



8.4.14

NIGERIA | Gunmen Attack Catholic Church

At least one person is confirmed dead and several others injured when Fulani gunmen attacked a church service in the southern part of Kaduna State on Sunday, Aug. 3.

According to eyewitnesses, the gunmen invaded the Catholic church in Ungwar Poppo village in the Kachia Local Government Area (LGA) of Kaduna fired sporadically, killing a young man who was guarding the church and injuring several other members of the congregation, some of them seriously.

Sunday's attack marked the third outbreak of religious violence in Kachia this year. On May 11, violence erupted in Kachia Town when Muslim youths attacked and destroyed Nassara Baptist Church after discovering part of the fence of an Eid prayer ground situated close to the church was damaged and blamed this on the congregation. In retaliation, Christian youths set fire to two mosques.

There has been a surge in attacks by increasingly well-armed Fulani herdsmen on non-Muslim villages in Bauchi, Benue, Kaduna, Plateau, and Taraba, States this year. The progressively sophisticated tactics and weaponry utilized by the herders, including AK 47 machineguns, has led several observers to conclude they have developed links with the Islamist terror group Boko Haram.

The predominantly Christian southern part of Kaduna has been prone to episodic violence since electoral violence unfolded along religious lines during the 2011 presidential elections. Villages in southern Kaduna have experienced night attacks by Fulani gunmen at fairly regular intervals since 2011. In one of the worst attacks this year, 147 people were killed and 285 houses and three churches were razed March 14, when Fulanis armed with guns, chemical explosives, and machetes launched attacks on the villages of Ungwar Sankwai, Chenshyi, and Ungwar Gata in Kaura LGA. The assailants reportedly travelled to the villages via a border area between Kaduna and Plateau States and escaped through the same route.

CSW's Chief Executive Mervyn Thomas said, "Our thoughts and prayers are with the relatives and friends of the young man who made the ultimate sacrifice, laying down his life to ensure the safety of others. By attacking people who posed no threat and had merely gathered to worship, these assailants committed a heinous and egregious violation of the right to freedom of religion and illustrated once again their wanton disregard for the sanctity of human life. It is vital that communities in the southern part of Kaduna feel secure and are able to exercise their constitutional right to religious freedom without hindrance or fear. Given the geographical proximity of some of the states that are regularly targeted by these gunmen, security

arrangements must include a comprehensive and unified strategy encompassing Kaduna, Plateau State and the southern part of Bauchi State, if this is not in place already.”