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NIGERIA | One Dead, Church Torched in Village Attack

A pastor's daughter died, several people were injured and a Baptist church was torched during an attack on a village in the Rogo Local Government Area (LGA) of Kano State on the evening of April 1.

At a press conference in the Nigerian capital Abuja on April 7, General Ishaku Ahmed Dikko (Rtd.), president of Tarayyar Masihiyawan Nijeriya (a Hausa, Fulani and Kanuri Christian organisation), said the daughter of Rev. Habila Garba suffocated following an arson attack on her home in Gidan Maso Village. Local Muslim youth set fire to the house after failing to locate Yahaya Joshua, a Christian who briefly converted to Islam before returning to Christianity.

General Dikko said the mob wanted to kill Joshua. When they could not find him they lit cornstalks inside the church and burned it to the ground, ignoring the pleas of the local Christians. They then attacked the pastor's residence nearby.

The mob also assaulted local Christians with machetes and two people sustained broken arms. "The Christians present exhibited great Christian qualities by not taking law into their hands by trying to stop them by force," said General Dikko.

The incident was reported to the police and the District Head. Tarayyar Masihiyawan Nijeriya is also urging the authorities to take all necessary measures to end harassment of and attacks on the Christian community, "We have the right to belong to any religion of our choice and live anywhere in this country. We call on the authorities at all levels to rise up to their responsibilities of protecting lives and properties of every citizen in this country."

The attack in Rogo occurred barely a week after an arson attack on a branch of the Living Faith Church (also known as Winners Chapel) in Giwa LGA, Kaduna State, on March 20 by two unidentified men riding a motorcycle. The arson came a few months after the founder of Winners Chapel, David Oyedepo, reportedly endorsed outgoing President Goodluck Jonathan in the presidential election.

Mervyn Thomas, Chief Executive of Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW), said, "CSW extends its deepest condolences to Rev. Garba and his family. We also pray for the swift recovery of those injured in this attack. It is deeply alarming that a young woman has lost her life at the hands of people seeking to deprive someone of his internationally and constitutionally-guaranteed right to adopt a religion of his own choice. Given the fact that the Rogo attackers are from the same community and are known to the victims, we urge the local authorities to apprehend and prosecute the perpetrators and to ensure the protection of local non-Muslims, their homes and their houses of worship. As well as combating Boko Haram, the Nigerian authorities must be proactive in ending the impunity surrounding religion-related violence in

northern and central Shari'a states by other non-state actors, ensuring those responsible are swiftly brought to justice."