

## **Suicide Attack on Nigerian Church Raises Fears of Sectarian Violence**

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Nigerian authorities say eight people were killed and 100 more injured when a suicide bomber attacked a Catholic church during morning services, raising fears of renewed sectarian violence in the volatile city of Kaduna.

About 20 minutes after the bombing a woman weeps outside the partially destroyed church

"I am feeling bad already," she said.

While police try to clear the area, she says she lost brothers and sisters in the morning attack.

Nigeria's National Emergency Management Agency spokesman Yushau Shuaib said a suicide bomber rammed his car into the barriers surrounding the church.

The rescue operation was initially delayed, he added, as angry residents attacked emergency vehicles and fights were reported between Christians and Muslims. He said the city is now calm and heavily secured.

A VOA reporter at the scene said after the attack Christian and Muslim youth took to the streets in the surrounding area, guarding their neighborhoods. He says now residents are mostly at home, scared.

The chairman of the Kaduna State chapter of the Youth Christian Association of Nigeria, Diji Haruna, says he was two kilometers away when the bomb exploded. He rushed to the scene where he saw three other buildings damaged by the force of the blast.

Haruna says the attack also damaged efforts to end sectarian violence in Kaduna, a city in Nigeria's "Middle Belt," that is divided like the rest of the country, with mostly Muslims in the north and mostly Christians in the south.

"What happened in the church today is amazing, after all the efforts to see how Kaduna can live in peace," he said. "As far as we are concerned this is a terrible situation. This is a step 10-times backwards for Kaduna State."

Human Rights Watch says sectarian violence has claimed thousands of lives in Nigeria in the past decade. After a Kaduna church bombing in June, nearly 100 people were killed in clashes between Muslims and Christians.

No one has claimed responsibility for the latest bombing, but it is similar to others attributed to an Islamist militant group known as Boko Haram, which says it wants jailed members freed and the implementation of Islamic law.

Boko Haram has been blamed for 1,400 deaths in the past three years. The group claims attacks on churches, security forces, government buildings, schools, communications networks, newspapers, and the local U.N. headquarters.

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