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Nigeria court in Kano sentences cleric to death for blasphemy

An Islamic court has sentenced a Nigerian cleric to death by hanging for insulting the Prophet Muhammad in the northern city of Kano.

BBC (06.01.2016) - <http://bbc.in/1JE06pe> - Abdulazeez Dauda, popularly known as Abdul Inyass, was convicted after a trial held in secret to avoid protests.

Five of his followers were also sentenced to death last year.

These are the first death sentences for blasphemy handed down by a Nigerian Sharia court; those delivered for other offences have not been carried out.

Mr Inyass is a preacher at a local faction of the Tijaniya sect, founded in Senegal by Sheikh Ibrahim Niassé, which has a large following across West Africa.

He was reported to have said that "Niassé was bigger than Prophet Muhammad" during a lecture at an event in May, leading to violent protests in the city.

The BBC's Yusuf Ibrahim Yakasai in Kano says he then fled to the capital, Abuja, and nine of his followers were arrested for their alleged part in organising the event.

When they were arraigned in court, there were further clashes and the courthouse was set on fire, he says.

Anyone who is not satisfied with the judgement of a Sharia court can appeal to the Sharia Court of Appeal in the state within three months. From there the case can be taken to the federal Court of Appeal, which is secular and, finally, to the Supreme Court.

There are judges of the Court of Appeal who are learned in Islamic law and who would be convened by the court's president to hear the case.

The Sharia courts only try Muslims. If a case involves a Muslim and a non-Muslim, the non-Muslim will be given the option of choosing where he/she wants the case to be tried. The Sharia court can only hear the case if the non-Muslim gives written consent.

Amina Lawal, who was found guilty of adultery in 2002 and sentenced to death by stoning, was acquitted by a Sharia Court of Appeal.

Four of the followers were acquitted and the five sentenced to death are appealing against their conviction at the state's high court.

Kano has a predominately Muslim population and Islamic courts operate alongside secular courts.

Mr Inyass, whose five-month trial was held in secret for security reasons, will also be able to appeal against the verdict at the high court.

Several states in northern Nigeria introduced Sharia after the country returned to civilian rule in 1999.

Tijaniya at a glance

The Sufi sect of Tijaniya was founded in Algeria in 1784 by Ahmad ibn Muhammad al-Tijani.

It spread all over the world, with large following in North and West Africa. It also has followers in South Africa, Indonesia and other parts of the world.

There are other Sufi sects in Islam but Tijaniya is the largest.

They have three main daily practices: Asking the forgiveness of God; sending prayers to the Prophet Muhammad and affirming the Oneness of Allah.

Senegalese-born Sheikh Ibrahim Niasse was credited with reviving the sect in the 20th Century. People travel from across the continent to visit his shrine.

They have several factions including the Haqiqa (Realist) group, whose members were convicted of blasphemy in Kano.

Ethnic cleansing of Christians in central Nigeria too?

World Watch Monitor (30.11.2015) - <http://bit.ly/1IEtvLW> - Everyone has heard of the violent atrocities committed by Boko Haram in northeast Nigeria, but Taraba State, in what's called the Middle Belt of the country, is also the scene of severe violence: Hausa-Fulani Muslim herdsmen regularly commit atrocities against indigenous Christian farmers.

An in-depth report suggests that these atrocities against Christians can be described as "ethnic/religious cleansing", with features of "genocide".

The Nigeria Conflict Security Analysis Network (NCSAN) report on this violent conflict (2013 - 2015) refutes the claim that the conflict is being caused mainly by environmental degradation and migration, and instead points strongly to an Islamist agenda of domination.

The report produces data on different categories of atrocities committed against Christians, and places those data in a historical framework. It reveals that Christians in Taraba State are often confronted with severe violence caused by Hausa-Fulani Muslim herdsmen.

Between Dec. 2013 and July 2015, research showed:

- 1,484 Christians were killed (532 men, 507 women and 445 children).
- 2,388 Christians were injured (1,069 men, 817 women and 502 children).

Besides those killed or displaced, statistics show destruction of 171 churches, 314 houses (including 15 complete family compounds with many houses and other properties), 39 shops and businesses of Christians, as well as many fields, goods and other possessions.

The atrocities have led to many – mainly Christians – becoming internally displaced (known officially as IDPs).

In Taraba State there are 10 IDP camps with an estimated 11,898 IDPs; neighbouring Benue State has six IDP camps hosting about 12,664 Christian IDPs from Taraba State. These IDP camps are provided for by church organisations, cultural associations and civil society groups, in Taraba and Benue states.

Another estimated 10,000 IDPs have settled in villages and towns around the Nigeria-Cameroon border. This adds up to at least 30,000 IDPs. NCSAN reports that while the conflict against Boko Haram continued, “there were no designated camps by the Taraba State government for the displaced Christians”. Some argue that “the government’s refusal to provide camps was a tactic to conceal from the attention of the world the huge population that had been displaced in the state”.

NCSAN clearly states that the data on different categories of violence against Christians by Hausa-Fulani Muslim herdsmen is not complete. The researchers estimate that the information gathered only covers 50% of the total violence committed. The data is incomplete because security reasons limited the areas within Taraba State the researchers could visit, and not everybody they met dared to talk. The report gives no data on violence against Muslims. NCSAN asserts that as far as violence against Muslims is concerned, the researchers have “diligently searched for data, but no one was willing to talk or to share documented information”.

The atrocities committed by the Hausa-Fulani Muslim herdsmen can be, at best, described as ethnic cleansing, and at worst, as genocide.

NCSAN sees four reasons why Christians are being targeted in Taraba State:

- Promotion of Islam by the further unfolding of the Dan Fodio [an early nineteenth century Islamic teacher] jihad.
- Islamist domination through traditional institutions.
- Islamist domination through political control.
- Islamist domination through attacks by Hausa-Fulani Muslim herdsmen.

NCSAN concludes: “In fact, for many people the atrocities committed by the Hausa-Fulani Muslim herdsmen can be, at best, described as ethnic cleansing, and at worst, as genocide. This is because, from the evidence presented, there is a deliberate and calculated infliction of physical destruction, targeted at particular religious and ethnic groups. Such destruction is supported and driven by a religious supremacist ideology to ensure Islam dominates all aspects of life in Taraba State.”

NCSAN concludes that the world is silent, and the killings and other atrocities committed by Hausa-Fulani Muslim herdsmen are being relegated to the background of national and international attention.

An earlier fact-finding mission of NCSAN (completed March 2015) had investigated the non-Boko Haram violence against Christians in the Middle Belt (Benue, Kaduna, Nasarawa and Taraba States), and concluded that a jihad perspective plays a dominant role in the dynamics of the conflict. The March report also highlighted the need to delve deeper into the situation in Taraba State, which is what this report does.

An additional report by Yonas Dembele (August 2015), a World Watch List researcher for Open Doors International, classified the conflict in the Middle Belt as ethnic/religious cleansing. One of Dembele's recommendations was to "urge the UN Human Rights Council to send a Commission of Inquiry to the Middle Belt region".

According to Dembele, "if proof can be given of ethnic cleansing as defined under the international criminal law, appropriate action should be taken, including bringing the perpetrators to justice". This is what this report sets out to do in more detail.

Church suicide bomber kills priest and 4 others amid weeks of Boko Haram attacks leaving over 100 dead during Ramadan

The Christian Post (06.07.2015) - A suicide bomber with possible ties to the radical Islamic terror group Boko Haram blew himself up inside a church in the Nigerian town of Potiskum on Sunday, killing a priest and four other Christians in an attack that mirrors past bombings by the organization that has allied itself with ISIS.

The bomber attacked Redeemed Christian Church of God and killed a priest and four others, including a mother and her two children.

No terror group has claimed responsibility for the attack, but authorities said the method, target and location are consistent with bombings perpetrated by Boko Haram.

More attacks followed throughout the day, as terrorists also bombed a mosque and Muslim restaurant in Nigeria's central city of Jos, killing around 44 people. Authorities believe these attacks were also carried out by Boko Haram.

Three days prior, Muslim extremists also ravaged northeastern Nigerian villages, killing nine villagers and burning down 32 churches and about 300 homes, according to Stephen Apagu, chairman of a self-defense group in Borno state's Askira-Uba local government area.

These are the latest in a series of attacks carried out in the area. Some of which happened last week when dozens of Christians in the northeast Nigerian towns of Kwada and Kautikari were slaughtered.

"They killed dozens of people and burned houses after attacking worshipers," said survivor Mallam Yahya to The Associated Press last week.

"The latest attack by Boko Haram on four churches and those innocently attending Sunday services inside once again affirms the religious motivation of this group's heinous crimes against the Nigerian people. For years, the Christian population of north Nigeria has faced a devastating offensive by Islamic militants that has yet to be effectively countered," said Cameron Thomas, International Christian Concern regional manager for Africa.

"The bloodied soil of Kwada and Kautikari villages serve as a heart-rending cry for greater action to ensure the safety of Christians wishing to exercise their right to practice their beliefs free from fear of retribution at the barrel of gun or trigger of an explosive."

Boko Haram's attacks extend past civilians as the group recently attacked a military camp in the neighboring government area of Damboa and killed around 51 soldiers. The terrorists were equipped with armored personnel carriers mounted with anti-aircraft guns and were armed with rocket launchers and submachine guns.

Open Doors USA, an organization that monitors the persecution of Christians around the world, spoke out against the extreme violence being perpetrated against believers in Nigeria last month.

"The alarming trend of violence against Christians in Nigeria over the past months highlights the lack of religious freedom they have and daily dangers they face from the Islamic terrorist group Boko Haram and other violent Islamic organizations," said Open Doors President and CEO David Curry.

"Going to school, attending church or identifying yourself as a Christian is a very brave decision in Nigeria. It is turning into a bloodbath. Christians in the West must stand in the gap with our prayers and support."

Boko Haram's attacks in Nigeria have left more than 2,000 people dead this year alone, and an estimated 750,000 have fled their homes.

U.S. State Department spokesman John Kirby condemned Boko Haram's recent attacks in northeastern Nigeria, saying: "As we have said before, the people of northern Nigeria deserve to live free from violence and from terror. The U.S. continues to provide counterterrorism assistance to help Nigerian authorities develop a comprehensive approach to combat the threat posed by Boko Haram."

Pastor, more than 70 Christians killed in Plateau State

Morning Star News (14.05.2015) – Gunmen killed a church pastor and more than 70 other Christians in Plateau state in the past month, sources said.

Setting fire to church buildings and houses in attacks that continued this week, Fulani Muslim herdsmen on May 2 killed the Rev. Luka Gwom of the Church of Christ in Nations (COCIN) in the town of Foron, Barkin Ladi Local Government Area (LGA).

A member of the slain pastor's congregation identified only as Paulina was also killed. A Christian community leader in Foron, Ishaku Pam, confirmed the killing of pastor Gwom, whom he said was his pastor, and said Paulina had gotten married in the church two weeks before.

Muslim herdsmen also launched attacks on Monday (May 11) in Plateau state's Riyom LGA, a source told Morning Star News in a text message.

"The jihadists, in their quest to eliminate Christians in Plateau state and their thirst for blood, have succeeded in killing Christians and burning their houses," wrote Gyang, whose full name is withheld for his protection, on Monday. "They are right now attacking Rim, Bangai, Gwon, Wereng, Ringya and Sopp."

Those attacks left seven Christians dead, he said on Thursday (May 14).

In the Barkin Ladi LGA, he said a "mass burial" took place in Foron on May 4 for 27 Christians killed on May 2. Another area source confirmed the deaths.

"I was at the burial of the Christians killed in the Foron attack, and we counted 27 corpses," he told Morning Star News.

In two other attacks in the area that day, 17 Christians were killed in Vat village, and 13 other Christians were slain in Zakupang, sources said. The victims included women and children.

Gyang said on May 7 that Fulani Muslims attacked Rim, in Riyom LGA.

"I was at Rim yesterday for a burial when a large number well-armed Fulanis came to attack the village," he said. "This led to the killing of two of our community members on the farm. You're aware that we in Riyom and Barkin Ladi LGAs have been under siege and invasion. Lives have been lost almost every day, and [there is] no serious action from any quarter by the government. But we are still faithful to our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ."

The attacks in Riyom and Barkin Ladi appeared to have no connection with Fulani accusations of cattle-rustling by youths from predominantly Christian tribes in Wase LGA, more than 160 miles away, in the past few weeks. A spokesman for the Special Task Force established to check attacks in Plateau State, however, made vague reference to cattle-rustling as the cause of violence in Barkin Ladi, according to Nigerian news reports. Gyang said on April 30 that two Christians who were returning from a burial were killed in an ambush in Barkin Ladi the previous day, and "four other Christians have just been killed in Kwi, in the Riyom Local Government Area."

On April 25, he reported a prior attack.

"Fulani Herdsmen have continued with their invasion of Christian communities here," he said in a text message. "The village of Shonong is under attack. Six Christians have also been killed in Kwi, Torok, and Rim, all in Riyom."

Five Christians were killed in the attack on Shonong village; one was killed in Torok; two were killed in Kapwen; and two were killed in Rim village, he said.

Christians in Barkin Ladi and Riyom have faced increasing attacks from Muslim militants and Muslim Fulani herdsmen in the past decade.

Emmanuel Loman, chairman of the Barkin Ladi Local Government Council, confirmed the killings in Barkin Ladi. He called on the Nigerian government to take urgent security measures to curtail attacks by the herdsmen.

Muslim herdsmen have long attacked settled Christian farmers in Plateau, Bauchi, Kaduna, Taraba and Adamawa states, but in the past year analysts have begun to see some ties between the assailants and Islamic extremist groups keen to exploit longstanding ethnic, property and religious conflicts.

Church leaders say attacks on Christian communities by the herdsmen constitute a war "by Islam to eliminate Christianity" in Nigeria. Christians make up 51.3 percent of Nigeria's population of 158.2 million, while Muslims account for 45 percent and live mainly in the north.

Ethnic Fulani gunmen shouting the jihadist chant "Allahu Akbar" attacked three villages in Nigeria's Plateau state in September, burning down a church building and [killing at least 10](#) Christians.

'Tireless' missionary kidnapped in Nigeria

WWM (25.02.2015) - A 70-year-old missionary, active in education, health services and clean-water development, was abducted Monday by unspecified kidnappers in Nigeria.

Rev. Phyllis Sortor, born in Rwanda to Portuguese and French missionary parents and based in the U.S. state of Washington when not in the field, was taken by several men from the Hope Academy, in the central Nigeria state of Kogi, [said Bishop David Kendall](#) of the Free Methodist Church USA.

"Our precious friend and partner . . . has been abducted by unknown captors in Nigeria," [wrote Brenda Young](#), Director of [Clear Blue Global Water Project](#), an Ohio-based mission agency, which has sponsored some of Sortor's work in Nigeria. "She is one of the most dedicated, tireless women of God we know."

[NBC news reported](#) that five armed men barged into the Hope Academy compound at 10:30 a.m. Monday, firing shots into the air. Citing Police Commissioner Adeyemi Ogunjemilusi, NBC said no one else was targeted, leading police to conclude Sortor was specifically sought out. Through a Sortor friend, the kidnappers later demanded 60 million Nigerian naira, or about US \$300,000, NBC quoted the commissioner as saying.

In a [Free Methodist World Missions publication](#), Sortor is listed as the financial administrator of Hope Academy and the Hope extension school, in the town of Ikot Ntuk, in southern Nigeria, and as a teacher at a Bible school and the Wesley Evangelical School of Theology. It also describes her as a supporter of "community health evangelism" and women's literacy projects.

In a January newsletter to supporters, Sortor described the Jan. 19 opening of a school by International Child Care Ministries in the city of Enugu, in the southeastern state of the same name.

"We began with 82 children, 58 of whom are Muslim, Fulani kids from one near-by camp!" she wrote. "We have two excellent, Hausa-speaking teachers for these Fulani kids! The Fulani parents are wonderfully cooperative -- sending food and water with their kids, organizing a Parent-Teacher Association -- giving us Fulani security guards for the school!"

The Fulani are an ethnic people of Western Africa, many of them herders, and most of them Muslim.

Clashes between the mainly Christian indigenous Berom communities and the Muslim-dominated Fulani tribe have been frequent in Nigeria, but mostly in the central region of the country, north of the region where Sortor has been working. NBC reported that Ogunjemilusi, the police commissioner, said he believes the kidnapping was carried out by a criminal gang, and not by Boko Haram, the militant Islamist insurgency that has waged a murderous war, largely against Christians, in Nigeria's northeast.

Kendall, bishop of the Indianapolis-based Free Methodist Church USA, said the U.S. State Department and the U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation have been notified, and are "working with local authorities to find and rescue her."

A prayer vigil was held Monday night in Seattle, where her stepson, Richard Sortor, [told TV station KCPO](#) that his stepmother is an unlikely target for ransom.

"We are just a working-class family, we don't have money," he told the TV station. "That's not a huge church, they don't have money. Why they took her, who knows?"

Boko Haram kills hundreds in assault on Baga and at least 15 other villages

CSW (14.01.2015) - Boko Haram's violent campaign in the north east of Nigeria has left hundreds dead in Baga and at least 15 villages in Borno State, and increased the vulnerability of the state capital Maiduguri.

On 3 January, Boko Haram insurgents stormed the town of Baga killing hundreds, forcing around 20,000 people to flee, and overrunning the headquarters of the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) comprising of troops from Nigeria, Niger and Chad. Reports indicate that troops from Chad and Niger withdrew from the camp prior to the attack, leaving the Nigerian army and civilian vigilantes to defend the town.

The assault on Baga and its environs continued until 7 January, while the Civilian Joint Task Force (JTF) and the Nigerian army attempted to regain the town. According to some estimates, 2,000 people may have died as the insurgents razed Baga and at least 15 other villages to the ground. However, several eyewitnesses put the death toll in the hundreds, while a statement issued on 13 January by the Nigerian Army, which had sent surveillance aircraft to the area, confirmed 150 deaths "in the interim." The statement also reiterated the army's earlier assurances that "the military has not given up on Baga or any part of the country", adding that "appropriate plans, men and resources are presently being mobilized to address the situation".

The Boko Haram assault on Baga and its environs appears to have been aimed primarily at the Civilian JTF and has also left the Borno State capital Maiduguri, a key target for Boko Haram, increasingly vulnerable. On 10 January, a suicide bomb attack, in which explosives were strapped to a ten year-old girl, killed at least 16 people and injured over 20 people. The sect is also targeting Yobe State; on 9 January, two heavy attacks on the state capital, Damaturu were beaten back by the army. On 11 January, at least 15 people died when a market in Potiskum was targeted by two young female suicide bombers. A day earlier, two people had died in an explosion at Potiskum's Divisional Police Station.

In a series of high-profile media interviews, Ignatius Kaigama, the Catholic Archbishop of Jos and president of the Nigerian Bishops Conference, urged Europe and America to offer more support to the Nigerian government to combat the terrorist threat posed by Boko Haram. Meanwhile, the Prelate of the Methodist Church of Nigeria, Archbishop Samuel Uche, claimed 95% of the insurgents were of Kanuri or Fulani ethnicity and that elements within the Nigerian armed forces and political elites are undermining the fight against terrorism.

CSW's Chief Executive Mervyn Thomas said, "We extend our heartfelt condolences to the families of those who have lost their lives in this latest series of terrorist attacks in Borno

and Yobe. Particularly despicable is Boko Haram's continuing use of vulnerable girls as disposable commodities to fulfill its murderous purposes. While Europe and America stand together in mourning recent events in Paris and assisting efforts against ISIL, we must also extend our solidarity and assistance to the people of Nigeria, who have lost so many over the years to the nihilistic violence of Boko Haram, and offer effective assistance to the Nigerian government, in order to bring these daily assaults on innocent civilians to an end."

Boko Haram insurgents kill 100 people as they take control of Nigerian town

The Guardian (09.01.2015) - Boko Haram extremists have killed more than 100 people and hoisted their black and white flag over a north-eastern town left undefended by Nigeria's military, according to a civil defence spokesman and a human rights advocate.

Hundreds of people in another north-eastern area, Askira Uba, are fleeing after receiving letters from the Boko Haram threatening to attack and take over their villages, Abbas Gava, a spokesman for the Nigerian Vigilante Group said.

"Nine major villages are on the run," he said.

Survivors said on Saturday that the insurgents had attacked the town of Damboa before dawn on Friday, firing rocket-propelled grenades, throwing homemade bombs into homes and gunning down people as they tried to escape the ensuing fires. Most of the town had burned down, they said.

A human rights advocate said Boko Haram had struck again as people were trying to bury their dead, and that the toll was probably much higher than 100. He spoke on condition of anonymity because he is not authorised to speak to reporters.

The only defence came from vigilantes armed with clubs and homemade rifles, Gava said.

The town had been under siege for two weeks, since Boko Haram dislodged soldiers from a new tank battalion camp on its outskirts.

The defence ministry claimed to have repelled the attack and killed at least 50 insurgents for the loss of six soldiers, including the commanding officer, but locals said many soldiers had been killed and that the military had been driven from the base. They said in the past week the extremists have twice ambushed military convoys trying to reach the base.

The militants cut off access to the town on Monday, when they blew up a bridge to the south of it. Damboa is on the main road south from Maiduguri, the Borno state capital, and at a strategic crossroads for farmers bringing their produce to market.

Hundreds of thousands of farmers have been driven from their land by the five-year-old insurgency, and officials have been warning of imminent food shortages.

Boko Haram has attracted international condemnation for the abduction of more than 200 schoolgirls who have been held in captivity for three months.

The insurgents have increased the number and ferocity of their attacks this year, particularly in their north-eastern stronghold, and they also have detonated bombs as far away as Lagos, the commercial capital in the south-west.

Human Rights Watch published a report this week which said Boko Haram had killed more than 2,000 civilians in an estimated 95 attacks during the first half of 2014. That compares with an estimated 3,600 people killed in the first four years of the insurgency.

Boko Haram wants to enforce an Islamic state in Nigeria, though half the country's population of 170 million is Christian.
