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NIGERIA: SIX PASTORS KILLED, 40 CHURCHES RAZED IN JOS VIOLENCE

As smoke clears, mayhem ignited by Muslim attacks leaves 25,000 people displaced.



Joseph Yari

"Shortly after my husband left, I heard anguished cries, only to be told that my husband had been shot dead on the premises of the church," Yari said.

Her grief notwithstanding, she said she had forgiven the killers, as "they were ignorant of the crime they have committed because they do not know Jesus Christ."

The Rev. Emmanuel Kyari, pastor of Christ Baptist Church, Tudun-Wada, told Compass that Joseph Yari died helping other Christians who repelled Muslim fanatics bent on burning down his church building.

"Yari was standing beside my wife when he was shot by Muslims," Rev. Kyari said. "In addition to Yari who was killed, there were also three other Christians who were shot, and two died instantly."

Among the six slain pastors was the Rev. Ephraim Masok, pastor of the ECWA Church in the Rikkos area of Jos, who had moved his family out of harm's way and was returning to the church premises when Muslim fanatics attacked and killed him. Rev. Masok was buried on Saturday (Dec. 6).

A Church of Christ in Nigeria (COCIN) leader in the Chawlyap area identified only as Pastor James was killed in the rioting that left Jos skies covered in smoke, as was the Rev. Bulus Tsetu of an Assemblies of God church. Names of the other three slain clergymen from Roman Catholic, Baptist and Deeper Life Bible churches were not readily available, but their deaths were confirmed, according to church leaders.

Rev. Kyari and the Rev. Benjamin Nasara of ECWA Plateau Church provided the casualty figures to Compass.

Among the 40 destroyed churches in Jos, they said, was the ECWA Church, Rikkos; Kaunar Baptist Church, Rikkos; Christ Baptist Church, Tudun-Wada; Nasarawa Baptist Church; Adebayo Street First Baptist Church; Sarkin Mangu

JOS, Nigeria, December 11 (Compass Direct News) – The murderous rioting sparked by Muslim attacks on Christians and their property on Nov. 28-29 left six pastors dead, at least 500 other people killed and 40 churches destroyed, according to church leaders.

More than 25,000 persons have been displaced in the two days of violence, according to the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA).

What began as outrage over suspected vote fraud in local elections quickly hit the religious fault line that quakes from time to time in this city located between the Islamic north and Christian south, as angry Muslims took aim at Christian sites rather than at political targets. Police and troops reportedly killed about 400 rampaging Muslims in an effort to quell the unrest, and Islamists shot, slashed or stabbed to death most of more than 100 Christians.

Among Christians killed was Joseph Yari of the Evangelical Church of West Africa (ECWA), Angwan Clinic, Tudun-Wada in Jos. On Nov. 28, his wife Mary Yari told Compass, he had returned from his workplace along Ibrahim Taiwo Road saying he was going to a Baptist church that Muslims were setting on fire.

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Mary Yari

Akande's mother, Madam Akande, told those attending the funeral that her 28-year-old son was too young to die.

"Little did I realize that your telephone call to me on Thursday, the 27th of November, 2008 would be our last conversation," she said. "No leaf can fall from the tree without the authority, power and knowledge of God. And so I believe you shall rest peacefully in the bosom of our Lord Jesus."

Akande was a graduate of physics/electronics at The Polytechnic, Ibadan, doing his one-year mandatory national service to Plateau State when he was murdered.

Rev. Nasara of ECWA Plateau Church told Compass that church history shows "the blood of the martyrs brings about the birth of the church. We see these ones who have gone ahead of us as the seeds that God is using to make the church in Jos North and Plateau state to germinate."

Pre-Meditated Violence?

Rioting erupted in Jos in the wee hours of Nov. 28 while results of local council elections held the previous day were still being awaited. In the Nov. 27 elections, according to reports, Muslims in Jos North who suspected vote fraud – specifically, the late arrival of election materials to polling sites – raised a lament, and by 1 a.m. on Nov. 28 Muslim youth had begun burning tires, schools and churches.

The killing of non-Muslims followed in the early morning. Muslims began attacking Christians in areas such as Nasarawa Gwong, Congo-Russia, Rikkos, Ali Kazaure, Bauchi Road, Dutse Uku, Ungwar Rimi, and Tudun-Wada. Commands to defy authorities and join the "jihad" blared from a mosque loudspeaker in the Dilimi area, according to advocacy group Christian Solidarity Worldwide, including instructions to ignore a night-time curfew and attack anew.

Authorities' efforts to halt the rampage, including a Muslim assault on a police barracks, accounted for the estimated 400 corpses reportedly deposited in a key mosque, according to CSW, citing security sources.

Christians tried to defend their lives and properties, and non-Muslim youths reportedly began retaliatory attacks on Muslims, mosques and Muslim houses in the early morning. The Nigerian military arrived before noon to try to rein in the mayhem, which continued into the night.

At the end of two days, hundreds of persons from both sides of the religious divide were killed, with others injured and hospitalized at Jos University Teaching Hospital, ECWA Evangel Hospital, OLA Hospital and Plateau State Specialist Hospital.

More than 25,000 displaced persons have taken refuge at Rukuba Military barracks, NDLEA (Nigerian Drug Law Enforcement Agency) Barracks and Police Headquarters and Barracks, according to NEMA.

Rev. Nasara said the displacement of people who have lost their homes has had a severe affect on Jos churches.

"Right now I have two families and some Christian students from the university here, making up a total of 12 persons, who were displaced, and I have to take them in here in my house," he said.

The Most Rev. Ignatius Kaigama, Roman Catholic archbishop of Jos Archdiocese and Plateau state chairman of the Christian Association of Nigeria, said in a statement that fanatical Muslims ignited the violence by attacking Christians.

"We were greatly taken aback by the turn of events in Jos – we thought it was a political issue, but from all indications it is

COCIN Church; ECWA Church Kunga; Victory Baptist Church, Gofang; Deeper Life Bible Church, Ungwar Rimi; and Emmanuel Baptist Church, also at Ungwar Rimi.

Other Christians killed by Muslims in the rioting, the church leaders said, were Nenfort Danbaba of the ECWA Plateau Church and Oluwaleke Olalekan Akande of the Anglican Church from Ibadan, in southwestern Nigeria, who was on duty with the National Youth Service Program in Jos at the time of the crisis.

At the funeral service of Akande on Tuesday (Dec. 9), the Rev. Joseph Olatunde Alamu of the Cathedral Church of St. David, Kudeti, Ibadan, said young Christian men killed in the violence did not die in vain.

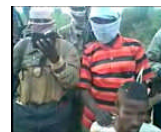
"Like the blood of Abel cried out for justice, they will not die in vain," he said. "God will revenge."

Akande's parents also spoke at his funeral service.

"God knows why it happened that way," Akande's father, 84-year-old Pa J.A. Akande, said. "Oluwaleke, you will be remembered always for your love, steadfastness, courage, obedience and other attributes of your life with which you were endowed by your Maker. Sleep well in the bosom of your Maker."



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not so," he said. "We were surprised at the way some of our churches and properties were attacked and some of our faithful and clergy killed. The attacks were carefully planned and executed. The questions that bog our minds are: Why were churches and clergy attacked and killed? Why were politicians and political party offices not attacked, if it was a political conflict?"

Businesses and property of innocent civilians were destroyed, he added.

"We strongly feel that it was not political but a pre-meditated act under the guise of elections," Kaigama said.

Plateau Attorney-General and Commissioner for Justice Edward Pwajok said in a statement on Tuesday (Dec. 9) that 500 persons had been arrested in connection with the violence, and that they will appear for trial at the High Court of Justice and Magistrates Courts.

On Sept. 7, 2001, religious conflict in Jos resulted in more than four years of bloodshed, killing thousands of people and displacing thousands of others. In 2004 an estimated 700 people died in Yelwa, also in Plateau state, during Christian-Muslim clashes.

END

*** Photos of Mary Yari, Joseph Yari, the Rev. Benjamin Nasara and the Rev. Emmanuel Kyari are available electronically. Contact Compass Direct News for pricing and transmittal.



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