

After carnage in Nigeria, faith leaders seek unity but fear religious war

by [David Crampton](#) in the [January 25, 2012](#) issue

After Muslim militants bombed a Nigerian church over the Christmas weekend, northern Nigerian Christians say they will fight to defend themselves against a possible religious war in Africa's most populous country.

On Christmas Day, a suicide bomber tried to force his way into St. Theresa's Roman Catholic Church in Madella, on the edge of the capital, Abuja. He was stopped by police and detonated a bomb as parishioners poured out of the church after Christmas mass. Authorities said 39 people died and many more were injured.

In New York, the National Council of Churches condemned the bombing as "intrinsicly evil." Incoming NCC president Kathryn Mary Lohre added that "we condemn any violent act so contrary to the common understanding of God's love as it is expressed among Christians, Muslims and persons of all the major faith traditions."

Commented Pope Benedict: "Violence is a path that leads only to pain, destruction and death."

In a statement, the northern branch of the Christian Association of Nigeria, an umbrella group of Catholic and Protestant churches, said Christians may be forced to defend themselves in future attacks. "We fear that the situation may degenerate to a religious war and Nigeria may not be able to survive one," Secretary General Saidu Doga said.

A later statement signed by eight leaders of CAN churches said: "In the year 2012, if these unprovoked attacks continue, and Christians remain unprotected by the security agencies, then we will have no choice but to defend our lives and property and take our own steps to ensure our safety and security."

The Boko Haram Islamic sect claimed responsibility for the bombing. (The name means "Western education is sinful" in the Hausa language.) It was one of a series of attacks in the region that killed scores. The sect aims to impose Shari'a law in Nigeria. It is the second successive year the sect has carried out attacks at Christmas after 80 were killed in a series of bombings last year.

CAN said the perpetrators "are well-known to government and no serious or decisive actions have been taken to stem their nefarious activities."

The spiritual head of Nigeria's 70 million Muslims, Alhaji Sa'ad Abubakar, met with Nigerian President Goodluck Jonathan, a Christian, on December 27 to discuss ways to ensure the stability of the nation.

"We want to assure our brother Christians and Christian leaders to stand on the part of truth according to our religion and continue to work for the greatness of this country," he told reporters after the two-hour closed meeting.

The Muslim Congress officially deplored the attacks, describing them as condemnable and totally unacceptable in civilized societies. —ENInews