

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PUBLIC STATEMENT

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## **NIGERIA: AUTHORITIES MUST PROTECT POPULATION AGAINST DEADLY ATTACKS**

Amnesty International today condemned the deadly attacks by members of Boko Haram in Kano, and called on the Nigerian Government to do more to protect the life and security of the population.

Sadly this is only the latest in a long line of deadly attacks carried out by the group. Boko Haram, officially called Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'a Wa'ati Wal Jihad, has perpetrated numerous human rights abuses and shows contempt for life. They must stop the attacks. However, the Nigerian Government has repeatedly failed to prevent, investigate, prosecute or punish these acts. The Federal Government must invest in reforming the criminal justice system to prevent more human losses in Northern Nigeria. These horrific crimes by Boko Haram must be investigated and the perpetrators brought to justice.

Amnesty International also urged the Federal Government to set up an independent commission of inquiry into the Kano bombings and make public its report.

The population in Northern Nigeria are caught between being targeted by Boko Haram and Nigeria's counter-terrorism measures that fail to prevent, investigate, prosecute or punish these acts and often result in new human rights violations perpetrated by the security forces with impunity.

At least 186 people were killed in Kano on 21 January when members of the sectarian group Boko Haram bombed security forces at eight different locations, including the zonal and state headquarters of the police in Kano and the headquarters of the State Security Service (SSS). The bombings started at 4.15 pm and were followed by exchanges of gun fire between Boko Haram and security forces lasting several hours. Several Boko Haram suspects had broken out of police custody or escaped. According to the police authorities, 29 security staff members were killed.

Amongst the victims were police officers, their relatives, and residents living close to the police stations. Channels journalist Enenche Akogwu was shot dead by suspected Boko Haram members near Government House.

Boko Haram claimed to have warned the state authorities in August 2011 that it would attack if the Boko Haram members detained in Kano State were not released from custody. On 21 January, shortly before the bombings, leaflets were distributed around the city again warning of attacks.

There have been serious criminal justice failings in the Nigerian government's response to Boko Haram. Suspected members of Boko Haram have been rounded up in previous sweeps, but have not been tried, due in part to the lack of proper police work to gather evidence. The main suspect of the 2011 Christmas Day bombing by

Boko Haram which led to at least 37 deaths, escaped police custody on 16 January. Women and children not suspected of any offences have been unlawfully detained and ill-treated to gain information about male family members suspected of offenses. Suspected members of Boko Haram have been subject to enforced disappearances.

The police are poorly trained and ill-equipped. Officers do not have enough basic equipment such as bullet-proof vests or handcuffs. The government must ensure that police have adequate equipment or training to carry out their duties.

Nigeria must not pursue security at the expense of human rights. Security forces must ensure their response is within legitimate boundaries, established legal frameworks and and fully respectful of human rights. Following previous attacks by Boko Haram, the security forces have often resorted to dragnet arrests, rather than arresting people on the basis of a reasonable suspicion that they committed an offence. The failure to properly investigate and bring to justice those responsible for human rights abuses fosters impunity and denies victims their right to a remedy.

The government must invest substantially and effectively in reforming the criminal justice system, so that similar attacks can be prevented and the perpetrators can be brought to justice in fair trials without recourse to the death penalty.

### **Background**

In 2011, at least 500 people were killed in attacks by Boko Haram, often targeting police officers and government officials. Since June 2011, bars and beer gardens in northern Nigeria were targeted, killing scores of people. The situation deteriorated towards the end of the year, with weekly reports of bombings and attacks.

A committee set up in August 2009 to “investigate the circumstances leading to the crisis including the alleged killing of the leader of Boko Haram and the slaughter or killing of over 17 Police officers,” has not made its findings public.

Nigeria has a weak criminal justice system. It is under-resourced, blighted by corruption and struggles to earn the trust of the population. The police resort too easily to the use of lethal force. Investigations into crimes, if they occur, are often cursory and not intelligence-led. The security forces often resort to dragnet arrests, rather than arresting people on the basis of a reasonable suspicion that they committed an offence. Suspects are regularly detained in cells that violate their right not to be subjected to inhuman and degrading treatment. Court processes are slow, with the result that most detainees, especially the poor, are kept in pre-trial detention for many years.