

AI Index: PRE 01/367/2011
25 July 2011

Nigeria security forces in random killing following bomb blast

The Nigerian authorities must immediately put a stop to unlawful killings by security forces, Amnesty International said today after at least 23 people were killed by police following a bomb blast on Saturday in the north-eastern city of Maiduguri.

The bomb, allegedly set off by the Islamist group Boko Haram, went off in the Budum market in central Maiduguri and injured three soldiers.

According to reports received by Amnesty International, the Nigerian Joint Military Task Force (JTF) responded by shooting and killing a number of people, apparently at random, before burning down the market.

“President Goodluck Jonathan must get a grip on the Nigerian armed forces and immediately prevent them from carrying out further human rights violations and unlawful killings,” said Tawanda Hondora, Amnesty International’s Deputy Director for Africa.

“The government must now investigate these heinous crimes and put on trial those found to be responsible for the killings. Allowing troops to go on the rampage will not bring to justice those who carry out these terrible bomb attacks on civilians,” he said.

“While staying within the law, the government must step up efforts to bring to justice members of Boko Haram who wreck untold suffering on people in the middle belt.”

One wing of Boko Haram has reportedly disowned the bomb blast, saying it may have been carried out by a splinter group.

The JTF was set up by the federal government in June 2011 to restore order in Borno state. In recent months, Amnesty International has received numerous reports that security forces in Borno state have resorted to unlawful killings, dragnet arrests, arbitrary and unlawful detentions, extortion, and intimidation.

One human rights defender told Amnesty International “Soldiers went on the rampage. They shot several people and burned all their shops and properties and burned their cars.”

Following a bombing in Maiduguri two weeks ago, members of the JTF reportedly threatened to shoot residents if they failed to report planned attacks.

“House to house searches, brutalisation, unlawful arrests, killings and disappearances have been the operating practice in Maiduguri for some months now. Unless steps are taken to ensure security forces operate within the law and respect human rights at all times, the next time Boko Haram attacks or kills a soldier, we are likely to see the same thing happen again,” said Tawanda Hondora.

Thousands of people living in Maiduguri have already left the city; and many more continue to do so.

The JTF have also been accused of raping women during their operations in recent months.

“Allegations of rape of women by members of the JTF have to be investigated and perpetrators brought to justice,” Tawanda Hondora said.

“Survivors of rape and sexual violence must be provided with appropriate support and aftercare,” he added.

Since July 2010, attacks by people believed to be members of the religious sect Boko Haram have increased. More than 250 people have been killed in such attacks, many of which have targeted police officers and government officials.

Several religious leaders have been killed and churches have also been targeted.

Since June 2011, Boko Haram has also attacked bars and beer-gardens, killing scores of people.