



Boko Haram: Bombing campaign sees civilian deaths spiral.

AI Index: AFR 44/2498/2015
24 September 2015

At least 94 people died on Sunday 20 September when bombs exploded in the cities of Maiduguri and Monguno in north east Nigeria. The actual number of dead is likely to be much higher. Based on analysis of trends and testimonies from eye witnesses and local human rights defenders, Amnesty International believes that Boko Haram is behind the attacks. These latest atrocities serves as a tragic reminders that Boko Haram continues to pose significant threat to the lives of civilians on an almost daily basis across north east Nigeria and to neighbouring countries Cameroon, Chad and Niger. Amnesty International's analysis, based on testimonies of witnesses, victims and media reports suggests that Boko Haram attacks may have claimed the lives of at least 1,600 civilians since the start of June 2015, bringing the death toll to at least 3,500 civilians in 2015 alone.¹

Amnesty International is calling on Boko Haram's leadership to immediately stop all killings and publicly condemn the killing of civilians by its members and all others fighting on its behalf. The governments of Nigeria, Cameroon, Chad and Niger must take all necessary legal measures to guarantee the safety, security and protection of civilians. They must also bring perpetrators of human rights abuses and crimes under international law to justice.

The dire human rights situation in north-east Nigeria and neighbouring countries demands the attention and action of the international community. Amnesty International urges the United Nations Human Rights Council (HRC) to renew its request for the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) to regularly report to the Council on human rights abuses and violations committed in countries where Boko Haram operates.

MORE THAN 94 PEOPLE KILLED IN DAY OF BOMBINGS

At 7:30 pm on Sunday 20 September, worshippers gathered at a mosque near Ajilari Cross roundabout in Maiduguri city for evening prayers. According to eyewitnesses, a few minutes after the prayers started, a bomb detonated inside the mosque. Mohammed Abba (not his real name) was praying in the open air outside the mosque. He told Amnesty International that the explosion killed many people at the mosque and damaged the building. After the explosion he left the scene to seek treatment for shrapnel in his thigh.²

Within a few minutes, about 100m away from the mosque a second bomb exploded in front of roadside shops. Mallam Adamu (not his real name), a 35-year-old man living near Ajilari Cross, told Amnesty International how he narrowly escaped both blasts. "I was going to the mosque and, as I crossed the road to enter the mosque, I heard the explosion. I decided to come back home.

¹ These figures cover Boko Haram attacks in Cameroon, Chad, Niger and Nigeria. They are based on Amnesty International's analysis of credible media sources and data collected by human rights defenders, think tanks and academic institutions. See also the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project available from <http://www.acleddata.com/data/realtime-data-2015/> and the Council on Foreign Relations "Nigeria Security Tracker" available from <http://www.cfr.org/nigeria/nigeria-security-tracker/p29483>.

² Amnesty International interview with an eyewitness, September 2015.

Then the second bomb exploded. I turned around and saw that a young man and lady had fallen down to the ground by the side of the road in front of a mini market. After the second explosion I was bleeding from my own stomach. I held it with my hands and rushed back home. From home I was taken to hospital.”³

Two additional bombs reportedly exploded in the Ajilari Cross area within an hour of the first attack. Amnesty International has not yet been able to speak with eyewitnesses to verify these explosions.

According to medical professionals and a human rights defender that visited nearby hospitals, at least 75 bodies were deposited at nearby mortuaries after these attacks.⁴ However, many more people are likely to have been killed in the blasts as some victims were not taken to hospitals but were taken directly for burial by their families. The morning after the attack, Abubakar Ibrahim (not his real name) went to search for his brother at the mosque. “As I went there, there were about 40 dead bodies. You cannot even recognise them. The bomb has spoiled the faces of the bodies. Inside the mosque there are plenty of bodies and some outside. My brother was inside. We recognised him through his clothes.”⁵ Abubakar buried his brother at Gwange cemetery at 12:30 pm.

Just two hours after the first bomb attack in Maiduguri, two explosions hit Monguno, a city 135 km to the north east. At around 9:30pm a bomb exploded near the outside of Monguno’s Onion Market and 15 minutes later a second bomb detonated at the nearby timber shop. Babangida Alkali (not his real name), an 18-year-old man working at the market had just shared dinner with friends when the first bomb hit. He told Amnesty International “I was about to leave [the market], took one or two steps and it happened. The explosion was at a Civilian Joint Task Force checkpoint, about 100m in front of me. I felt something hit me in my right ear and I was knocked to the ground.”⁶

Babangida was taken to the military barracks along with others injured and killed in the attack. Audu Bukar (not his real name), a 28-year-old vendor at Onion Market, was also knocked unconscious in the first explosion and taken to the barracks.⁷ Both men told Amnesty International that in the morning there were 18 dead men and children in the barracks and 30 injured people. Residents transported the injured to Maiduguri for treatment and at least one other person died during the journey.

HUNDREDS KILLED IN RECENT MONTHS IN NIGERIA

Since June 2015, Boko Haram has killed hundreds of people in bomb and gun attacks. Communities in Nigeria’s Borno and Yobe states continue to bear the brunt of Boko Haram’s violence. Fighters have continued to attack towns and villages that lacked any military presence. In the raids documented by Amnesty International since June 2015, Boko Haram gunmen frequently rounded up residents, shot those who tried to escape and executed men and boys. Fighters stole any supplies they needed and set fire to people’s homes, shops and markets.

³ Amnesty International interview with an eyewitness, September 2015.

⁴ Amnesty International interviews with a human rights defender who visited hospitals in Maiduguri and two medical staff, September 2015.

⁵ Amnesty International interview with an eyewitness, September 2015.

⁶ Amnesty International interview with an eyewitness, September 2015.

⁷ Amnesty International interview with an eyewitness, September 2015.

One of the most lethal attacks in recent months occurred on 2 July when Boko Haram fighters killed more than 120 civilians in a raid on Kukawa town, Borno state.⁸ An eyewitness told Amnesty International how Boko Haram fighters ordered residents out of their homes and assembled approximately 58 people outside the village head's house.⁹ The gunmen told the people to lie down on the street and shot them. Others were shot in their homes or as they tried to flee. Boko Haram set fire to buildings before leaving.

Amnesty International has also documented bomb attacks across north east Nigeria. Explosions killed civilians in the following Nigerian cities: Maiduguri, Borno state on 2, 3 and 22 June, 31 July and 20 September; Monguno, Borno state on 20 September; Damaturu, Yobe state on 17 and 26 July, and 25 August; Potikum, Yobe state on 5 July; Jos, Plateau state on 5 July; and Gombe city, Gombe state on 16 and 22 July. Based on interviews with 14 eyewitnesses and 15 interviews with human rights defenders, Amnesty International believes that at least 222 people died in these explosions.

BOKO HARAM'S ATTACKS IN CAMEROON

Amnesty International has also documented crimes under international law and human rights abuses by Boko Haram in northern Cameroon.¹⁰ Amnesty International documented raids by Boko Haram on the towns of Amchide on 15 October 2014 and Bia on 17 April 2015. In the attack on Amchide at least 30 civilians were killed, many as a result of deliberate targeting, as well as indiscriminate fire by Boko Haram fighters. Boko Haram also destroyed civilian property including a school, a church, a mosque and a health centre. When Boko Haram gunmen attacked Bia town, they deliberately targeted civilians, killing dozens, and methodically set fire to houses, destroying at least 150.

Although the frequency and scale of Boko Haram attacks in Cameroon have diminished since their peak between October 2014 and March 2015, regular suicide bomb attacks continue to claim civilians' lives in the Far North region of Cameroon.

On 22 July 2015, at least 13 civilians were killed and more than 30 wounded after two young female suicide bombers detonated their explosives almost simultaneously at the central market and in the nearby district of Barmare in the city of Maroua. A few days later, on 25 July 2015, at around 8 pm, at least 20 people were killed and more than 80 wounded after another young female suicide bomber detonated her explosives in a crowded bar in the popular district of Pont Vert in Maroua. Dozens more have been killed in other suicide attacks in Fotoko and Kerawa.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Amnesty International calls on Boko Haram to urgently end the deliberate targeting of civilians and to publically condemn all abuses of human rights and violations of international humanitarian law by its members and those who fight on its behalf. The governments of Nigeria and Cameroon must ensure that in their own operations and through the Multinational Joint Task Force, they take all necessary legal measures to guarantee the security of civilians and their properties in the affected communities.

The ongoing killings by Boko Haram underscore the importance of documenting and reporting on the human rights situation in areas affected by Boko Haram. On 30 September the HRC will consider a report on Boko Haram's abuses by the OHCHR. Amnesty International urges the HRC to

⁸ Amnesty International interviews with three eyewitnesses, July 2015.

⁹ Amnesty International interview with an eyewitness, July 2015.

¹⁰ Amnesty International "Human rights under fire: Attacks and violations in Cameroon's struggle with Boko Haram" 16 September 2015 (AFR 17/1991/2015) <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/afr17/1991/2015/en/>.

renew its request for the OHCHR to collect information and regularly report to the Council on human rights abuses and violations committed in countries where Boko Haram operates.

The work of the HRC is essential in supporting affected States to meet their obligations under international law and ultimately to ensuring that the conflict's victims can access justice and learn the truth.

BACKGROUND

Amnesty International has documented evidence of war crimes and crimes against humanity committed by Boko Haram, including murder, torture, rape, forced marriages and the recruitment of child soldiers.¹¹ Despite recent military advances, attacks by Boko Haram continue to be a daily feature of life in north-east Nigeria and northern Cameroon.

Bomb attacks routinely targeted locations with no military objective, including markets, transport hubs, bars, restaurants and places of worship. While Boko Haram has not claimed responsibility for all these attacks, Amnesty International believes, based on analysis of the pattern of attacks as well as information gathered from witnesses and human rights defenders, that the bombings fit the group's methods and targets.

According to eyewitnesses, Boko Haram used young women and girls as suicide bombers in many of the incidents. Such accounts corroborate testimony received by Amnesty International that Boko Haram has trained women and girls in the use of explosives.

In the course of security operations against Boko Haram, Nigerian and Cameroonian military forces have committed serious human rights violations and crimes under international law. On 3 June 2015 Amnesty International released a report which documented shocking levels of deaths in military custody, extrajudicial executions, torture, unlawful detention and arbitrary arrests by the Nigerian military.¹² The report named current and former military officers who should be investigated for their potential individual and command responsibility for these crimes. On 16 September 2015 Amnesty International released a report documenting violations by Cameroonian state security forces, including mass arbitrary arrests, extrajudicial killings, excessive use of force, enforced disappearances, deaths in custody and inhumane and degrading treatment.¹³ Amnesty International has called on both governments to ensure that evidence of human rights violations and crimes under international law are promptly and independently investigated.

¹¹ Amnesty International "'Our job is to shoot, slaughter and kill' Boko Haram's reign of terror in north-east Nigeria" 14 April 2014 (AFR 44/1360/2015) available from <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/afr44/1360/2015/en/>.

¹² Amnesty International "Stars on their shoulders. Blood on their hands. War crimes committed by the Nigerian military" 3 June 2015 (AFR 44/1657/2015) <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/afr44/1657/2015/en/>.

¹³ Amnesty International "Human rights under fire: Attacks and violations in Cameroon's struggle with Boko Haram" 16 September 2015 (AFR 17/1991/2015) <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/afr17/1991/2015/en/>.