

Network for Inter faith Concerns

Christian-Muslim News Digest Issue 4 2011

Christian-Muslim News Digest

Introduction

Welcome to the fourth issue of the Digest for 2011. It covers events in the Middle East and the implications of the 'Arab Spring' for Christians, South Sudan six months after the birth of the new state and an update on the situation in Nigeria.

Middle East: 'Arab Spring' or 'Christian Winter'?

The events of the 'Arab Spring' in North Africa and the Middle East have received a large amount of media coverage. One unforeseen result of these events has been an increase in levels of insecurity for Christians living in many of these states. This article examines the situation of Christians in Egypt and some international responses.

Egypt

The attack on a Coptic Church in Maspero on 9th October 2011, when according to official sources 23 Christians and 3 soldiers were killed, was a severe shock to many who believed that the mutual support shown between Muslims and Christians during the protests at the beginning of the year marked a lasting change. *Reuters* reporter Tamim Elyan, in ['Egypt's Christians vent fury at army after clash'](#), explains that the military had been sent to break up a Coptic demonstration, which was in response to the partial demolition of a church in Aswan the previous month.

Christians, and some Muslim activists, said the army had used excessive force. Protesters pelted military police with stones, petrol bombs and set light to army and other vehicles in the worst violence since Hosni Mubarak was ousted on Feb 11. The military-backed government says it does not discriminate and has promised to address Christian concerns. But for many Christians, Sunday's bloodshed was proof that the army council led by Field Marshal Mohamed Hussein Tantawi was ignoring the demands of a community which makes up about 10 percent of Egypt's 80 million people. Christian activists said the army used armored vehicles to disperse protesters at Maspero, an area around the state television building, after other tactics failed. ... Christians say Prime Minister Essam Sharaf promised months ago to push through a law giving equal treatment for [construction of] all places of worship, but say the pledge has been neglected. "The real problem is not mainly the Salafists or fundamentalist Islamists as we know they are there and we know they are attacking Copts and churches all the time," said Youssef Sidhom, editor of Orthodox Coptic newspaper al-Watani. "The problem is the severe reluctance of the cabinet and the authorities to enforce the rule of law and protect the Copts. The main demand of demonstrators (on Sunday) was that the authorities should arrest the criminals," he said.

The next day the 'Egyptian Family House' met in emergency committee with Muslim and Christian leaders and its president, Shaykh al-Azhar, Dr. Ahmad Muhammad at-Tayyeb. It issued a communiqué

['A Shock for Egypt's Conscience'](#) condemning the deaths:

1. Experience shows that the superficial treatment of and the conciliatory solutions to episodes of crisis over the past decades have brought no results, but instead have led to an ever increasing number of incidents, unknown in the past and which are unacceptable. This means that serious dangers jeopardise the country.
2. The plain speaking, free investigation and transparency that must govern the search for the deep causes of today's problem at its roots represent an absolute need, particularly in the light of the country's present conditions.
3. The Family House urges the Supreme Council of the armed forces and the Council of Ministers to quickly promulgate the law regulating the construction of churches, resolving the problems

connected to it from which regrettable incidents like this one originate. The Family House urges them to take the necessary practical measures to strengthen the constitutional provisions of the principle of citizenship for all Egyptians.

4. The Family House Council expresses its appreciation towards the Egyptian magistrature, which boasts a long-standing history of the defence of rights and freedom and the rule of law. Fully aware of the huge task of the Egyptian magistrature in the delicate circumstances that the country is going through, it is urged to give the issues of confessional violence the necessary priority in order to oppose this phenomenon, which is both alarming and exceptional for our fatherland after centuries of communal life and national unity.

5. The Family House, which appreciates the important role of today's media, while confirming its full support of the freedom of expression through its different instruments, nonetheless spurs the media to be up to national responsibility in this decisive phase of our modern history.

6. The Egyptian army has been and will remain the expression of the principle of citizenship, a principle that we all keep to in order to conserve the unity of our social fabric and to realise its Revival (*Nahda*) and Progress. Therefore, the Family House, expressing its respect for the noble history of our armed forces and their important role in the consolidation and protection of the revolution, considers that the continuation of such role and the defence of the prestige of the state represent an insurmountable red zone, whatever the circumstances may be.

The 'Egyptian Family House' is an initiative of Al-Azhar, announced in January 2011, following the bombing of a church in Alexandria on New Year's eve. It comprises a group of Muslim and Christian scholars to whom all Egyptians can resort to solve their problems.

During November 2011 protests against the 'interim military government' occurred in Tahrir Square and other locations all over Egypt. 41 people were killed and over 2,200 were injured as a result of these demonstrations and violent clashes between the demonstrators and security police. On 25th November Mouner Hanna Anis, Anglican Bishop of Egypt, issued a ['Statement on the Situation in Egypt'](#) which stated that the causes of the protests were:

- The rejection of a document produced last month by the interim government which will be used as a guideline for the upcoming constitution. This document states clearly that Egypt will be a secular country with the Sharia Law as the main source of legislation. It also affirms the right of citizenship and equality between all Egyptians. The document also gives some more privileges to the military.
- The fear that the military would not give up its control of the country to a civil government. This fear arose from the nomination of the Head of the Military Council to the presidency by some groups.
- The cessation of the investigation and judgment of civilians by the military as happened at the time of the Maspero killings on 9 October 2011. It is worth mentioning that the military was involved in the incident of Maspero and was also involved in the investigation and judgment--which is a conflict of interest.
- The lack of clarity in what is going on and what is going to happen in the future. Both the Military Council and the interim government have not communicated well with the people and there are unacceptable delays in dealing with conflicts and problems. For example, we are still waiting for the results of the investigations of the bombing in Alexandria on 1 January 2011 and all the consequent clashes.

Bishop Mouner was also concerned as to the motives of the demonstrators and whether they were being manipulated by Islamist political parties as Egypt began the process of electing a new parliament.

An interview by Naveen Qayyum (WCC staff writer) with David Youssef of the Coptic Evangelical Organization for Social Services (CEOSS) in Egypt, ['Could "Arab spring" turn into "Christian winter"?'](#), gives further insights into the current situation and the concerns of Christians in Egypt.

What is the political situation in Egypt after the “Arab spring”? And how is it resulting in migration?

This year Egypt has witnessed many political, social, cultural and religious changes. Yet this is not the end of struggles in Egypt. ... While they celebrate the dramatic political changes, these changes are accompanied by a state of instability. This instability has forced poor people to migrate to safe countries searching for better living. Despite there being relatively less turmoil in Egypt than in some other countries, many people have moved to escape from violence. ... However, as a reaction to radical Islamic groups rising after the collapse of the security apparatus, many Egyptians, especially Copts, preferred to migrate to the West.

Can you explain the recent political developments in Egypt?

The major development in Egypt is the ousting of the former dictatorial regime. Now, the Egyptians are full of hope to push their country into true democratic transitions.

However, there are many factors that frustrate the Egyptians. This includes the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) being too slow in leaving power in favour of a civilian regime. Many protesters have demanded to accelerate this transitional period. The rise of radical Islamic groups after decades of oppression by the former regime is also a concern. Now, these groups are asking to share in monitoring the new Egypt. These political groups, like Al Ekhwan al Muslmūn, Al Salafioun and Al Ja-ma’a Al Eslamiyya, now (after the first round of elections) have more than 40 percent of seats in the legislature. ... The partial failure of liberal powers in gaining a majority in the first stage of current parliamentary elections is also a setback. This has given birth to a state of uncertainty, which formulates a transitional period without any clear road map.

How is this situation affecting Christians in Egypt?

As a result of the security absence, Copts have faced increasing violence and sectarian tensions, which resulted in the burning of some churches such as Atfih, Embaba and Aswan. In the unfortunate incident on 9 October more than 30 Christians were killed while protesting against the burning of the church in Aswan. The rise of radical groups in Egypt has opened chances of establishing an Islamic state and implementing the Islamic laws (Shari’a). As a justifiable reaction, the Christians who already live with a sense of insecurity become more isolated in church communities. This has also triggered a wave of emigration among Christians, the major reason for which is the political uncertainty in the country. They fear that if the SCAF continues to rule, Egypt will be under the same military governance like the last 60 years. They also fear that if the radical agenda of political Islamic groups is realized, for example by developing an Islamic state, the Christians will not find a place in this state.

How are churches addressing these challenges? What is the ecumenical response?

The national churches in Egypt play a critical role in the social life. They have been raising the awareness about their followers being full citizens in their country. Also, churches try to raise awareness among Christians concerning their participation in social, political and cultural lives. Some church leaders are attending political and social events to participate in planning for the new Egypt after the revolution. On 11 November, a huge ecumenical prayer vigil for Egypt took place, with attendance of 70,000 Christians from all denominations at the Monastery of Saint Sam’an El Kharaz, from 6 p.m. to 6 a.m. People spent the whole night praying for Egypt.

Egyptian Elections

The first round of elections was held on 28th November 2011. Initial reports indicate that the ‘moderate’ Islamist Muslim Brotherhood will eventually gain the largest number of seats, with the Salafist group being in strong contention. A report by *Reuters* Tamim Elyan, [‘Egyptian voters reject Salafist hardliner in run-off’](#), 7th December 2011, shows the concerns of ‘liberal’ Egyptian Muslims and Christians:

The hardline Salafists surging in Egypt’s first free elections suffered an unexpected setback on Wednesday when a prominent spokesman lost a run-off vote to an independent candidate backed by the Muslim Brotherhood. Abdel Moneim el-Shahat was one of the most outspoken candidates of the Salafist Al-Nour party, which stunned Egyptians by winning 24 percent of the first round of voting last week against 36 percent for the more pragmatic Brotherhood. During the campaign, the bearded engineer outraged more moderate Egyptians with his clear calls for Salafist Islam - a strict interpretation inspired by Saudi Arabia’s Wahhabi sect - to be made the law of the land in Egypt. His defeat in the run-off in the Mediterranean port city of Alexandria came because liberal, Christian and young voters rallied behind the independent Hosni Dewidar, who also had the

Brotherhood's endorsement. "The Brotherhood doesn't represent me, but they are better than the Salafis," Coptic law student Beshoy Gerges, 23, said in Alexandria. "I would rather die than have a Salafi represent me in parliament."

In an article by *Reuters* Shaimaa Fayed, '[Egypt liberal calls for shift in tactics](#)', 12th December 2011, she interviews Amr Hamzawy, a political science professor who is a founder of the Egypt Freedom Party:

Hamzawy said he had turned down ministerial jobs this year, saying he wanted to enter politics through the ballot box. His gamble paid off: In the first round of voting, he became one of only four people who secured more than 50 percent of the votes needed to avoid a run-off. He said liberals had to work harder to unify their ranks. ... [they] "need to avoid generating and sustaining the impression among Egyptians that we as the civil camp fear Islamists. Those who fear do not convince at the ballot box".

First-round results from the staggered vote that will take six weeks to complete gave two Islamist-led alliances a combined two thirds of the votes for party lists, pushing a liberal bloc into third place. ... Unlike many other liberals, Hamzawy publicly challenged ultra orthodox Salafi Islamists who won a surprisingly big chunk of votes in the first round. ... Although initial results indicate Islamists could form a majority bloc in parliament, there are divisions within their ranks that mean liberals could still become influential players.

10th General Assembly of the Middle East Council of Churches

The 10th General Assembly of the Middle East Council of Churches (MECC), met in Paphos, Cyprus in late November 2011. A press release '[Churches in the Middle East re-affirm their commitment to peace](#)' stated that "Christians in the Middle East renewed their commitment to unity, dialogue and peace amidst varied political developments in the region". The [Final Communiqué](#) states:

Christians are deeply rooted in the East. They have effectively participated in and contributed to its renaissance and in defending the integrity of its territories and all the pertaining national rights of its inhabitants.

They stand ready and committed to participate in the building of a new future for the Middle East and accordingly they renounce the idea of emigration in spite of all the difficulties that Middle Eastern Christians are presently facing. They call upon all the faithful to hold steadfast to their hope in the peaceful coexistence of the peoples of the Middle East, and thus they support the recent and ongoing movements of reform, change and development for the common good of humanity.

In view of what is now occurring in some countries of The Middle East, the General Assembly wishes to remind all concerned parties, *but especially the International Community*, of the need to preserve and protect fundamental human rights and principles, such as the freedom of thought, of religious belief and of political action.

The Assembly asserts its repudiation of resorting to violence as a means of conflict resolution, no matter who the perpetrator may be. Dialogue, equal citizenship and the rule of law -- in the context of a civil and just state -- must prevail amongst all the peoples of the Middle East.

House of Lords Debates Plight of Middle East Christians

On Friday 9th December 2011 the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Most Rev Rowan Williams, moved a motion "That this House takes note of the situation of Christians in the Middle East", in the House of Lords, the upper chamber of the British parliament. The Archbishop introduced and closed the debate which lasted almost five hours. Gerald Butt reports in '[Lords debates plight of Middle Eastern Christians](#)' in the *Church Times*, 16th December 2011, that:

The current plight of Middle Eastern Christians was all the more disturbing because of their deep roots in the region, stretching back two millennia: "It is all too easy to go along with the assumption that Christianity is an import to the Middle East rather than an export from it. . . We are not talking about a foreign body, but about people who would see their history and their destiny alike bound up with the countries where they live, and bound up in local conversations with a dominant Muslim culture, which they are likely to see in terms very different from those that might be used by Western observers."

Dr Williams went on to discuss the impact on Christians of the Arab Spring, and, in particular, the success of Islamic groups in recent elections in the region. At present, he said, it was too early to

tell whether the Islamists' strong showing would mean "new kinds of repression in which non-Muslim and, importantly, non-orthodox Muslim communities will become targets for discrimination, or whether something more like the Turkish model will emerge: an openly and strongly Islamic government with, equally, a strong commitment to practical pluralism and political transparency".

The most important point to remember, Dr Williams emphasised, was that most Muslims believed "the continued presence of Christians in the region is essential to the political and social health of the countries of the Middle East. Their presence challenges the assumption that the Arab world and the Muslim world are just one and the same thing, which is arguably good for Arabs and Muslims alike." ...

The theme of Western attitudes towards Arab Christians at a time of growing Islamist influence was taken up by the Bishop of Guildford, the Rt Revd Christopher Hill. There was no denying, he said, that Christians in the Middle East were "subject to surveillance and harassment, churches are torched or bombed, and the faithful are killed". While the spreading of ultra-conservative interpretations of Islam might be, in part, responsible, so, too, was "the political identification of Christianity with the West and Western political and economic influence in the Middle East. Many Muslims now see in Christians a political instrument of the West."

Dr Williams stressed Middle Eastern Christianity's contribution to the spiritual life of the religion as a whole. He pointed, in particular, to the ancient monasteries in the Egyptian desert: "To lose the contemplative, reflective, and imaginative spirit represented in those monasteries and the communities that support and sustain them would be for us to lose great depth from our Christian identity. If our Christian identity in the West becomes thinner and duller, so does our political and cultural identity overall."

Apart from coverage on Today in Parliament, the debate received very little attention in the media. The Archbishop of Canterbury's [web-site](#) gives a full transcript of his speeches, and [Hansard](#) provides a full transcript of the entire debate.

REFERENCES

- Reuters* Tamim Elyan, 'Egypt's Christians vent fury at army after clash', 10th October 2011, <http://uk.reuters.com/article/2011/10/10/us-egypt-clashes-copts-idUKTRE7993FR20111010>
- Shaykh al-Azhar 'A Shock for Egypt's Conscience' 10th October 2011, <http://www.oasiscenter.eu/en/node/7502>
- Most Rev Mouneer Hanna Annis, 'Statement on the Situation in Egypt', 25th November 2011, <http://www.dioceseofegypt.org/english/node/267>
- WCC Naveen Qayyum 'Could "Arab spring" turn into "Christian winter"?' 12th December 2011, <http://www.oikoumene.org/en/news/news-management/eng/a/article/1634/could-arab-spring-t.html>
- Reuters* Tamim Elyan, 'Egyptian voters reject Salafi hardliner in run-off', 7th December 2011, <http://uk.reuters.com/article/2011/12/07/uk-egypt-election-salafis-idUKTRE7B622T20111207>
- Reuters* Shaimaa Fayed, 'Egypt liberal calls for shift in tactics', 12th December 2011, <http://af.reuters.com/article/topNews/idAFJ0E7BB00J20111212?sp=true>
- Middle East Council of Churches (MECC), 'Churches in the Middle East re-affirm their commitment to peace', 14th December 2011, <http://www.oikoumene.org/en/news/news-management/eng/a/article/1634/churches-in-the-middle-ea.html>
- MECC 'Final Communiqué of the 10th General Assembly', 30th November 2011, http://www.oikoumene.org/fileadmin/files/wcc-main/2011pdfs/MECC_Communicu%C3%A9.pdf
- Church Times* Gerald Butt, 'Lords debates plight of Middle Eastern Christians' 16th December 2011, <http://www.churchtimes.co.uk/content.asp?id=121990>
- Archbishop of Canterbury, 'House of Lords Debate on Christians in the Middle East', 9th December 2011, <http://www.archbishopofcanterbury.org/articles.php/2277/house-of-lords-debate-on-christians-in-the-middle-east>
- Hansard* 'Record of debate' 9th December 2011, <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld201011/ldhansrd/text/111209-0001.htm#11120956000205>

South Sudan: Six months after Independence

Since South Sudan gained Independence in July 2011 media coverage has been much reduced, with only border clashes and inter-ethnic violence gaining any attention.

The Episcopal Church of Sudan (ECS) works in both South Sudan and Sudan. The Church continues to mediate in the on-going peace process and to raise awareness in the outside world of the situation within South Sudan and for Christians remaining in Sudan. The head of ECS is the Most Rev Daniel Deng, who is also Bishop of Juba, the capital of South Sudan.

An article '[Sudan – Archbishop Deng backs a secular South Sudan](#)' in *Church News Ireland* reports on a dinner held in late August 2011 by President Salva Kiir at State House, Juba, for Muslim leaders. The keynote speech was given by Archbishop Daniel Deng, leader of ECS.

Archbishop Daniel Deng called upon Christians and Muslims to work together for the common good. ... A major source of dissension between North and South during the civil war had been the imposition of Sharia law upon the south by the Khartoum government. The new republic has adopted a secular constitution and civil code, removing Islam from its court system. Archbishop Deng called upon President Kiir to create a national religious council which would facilitate dialogue and foster cooperation between the faiths. Interfaith dialogue would also serve to stabilise the new nation, removing religious passions from the political sphere. President Kiir called for the South Sudanese community to organize themselves ... and to build relations with the Christian majority. "Here in South Sudan there is no difference between Christians and Muslims. In our new nation we need unity and development; we have not left you (Muslims) out."

In November 2011, ECS held a Provincial Synod in Juba, the capital of South Sudan. The [Communiqué](#) released following the synod, highlights the concerns of the church about peace and reconciliation:

The ECS synod reaffirmed its commitment to serving Jesus Christ in both Sudan and South Sudan through the continued proclamation of the Gospel, through national and international advocacy efforts for peace and reconciliation between the communities of conflict in Sudan and South Sudan, and through service delivery in the areas of healthcare, education and social development.

It further details the advocacy work that the church is involved in:

We strongly condemn the persistent aerial bombardment of civilian territories, summary executions of innocents, and combat in civilian areas in the Nuba Mountains, Southern Blue Nile, Upper Nile State and Unity State. The bombs that fall are indiscriminate; they kill and maim young and old, man and woman, Christian and Muslim. In short, innocent civilians have become a target and their suffering has become political currency. We categorically denounce these heinous activities, crimes against humanity that further traumatise the people of Sudan and South Sudan.

We advise the Government of Sudan and the Government of South Sudan to return to the negotiating table and discuss national issues in a way amenable to peace and stability. We urge both governments to resolve any differences peacefully and not to resort to war and killing of the innocent civilians who yearn for peace.

It also raises concern about the continuing unrest in Western Equatoria and Jonglei states. In Western Equatoria, the continued presence of the Lord's Resistance Army, which operates its insurgency on Uganda from there, has led to insecurity for civilians. The Communiqué calls for international mediation and for the government to take action in order to protect the civilian population. In Jonglei there is conflict "between rebel groups and the South Sudan Army and skirmishes between armed civilian groups". ECS wants to see a real and lasting peace in Jonglei, the largest state in South Sudan as measured by both population and area.

Therefore, in the area of advocacy for peace and reconciliation, the ECS will remain committed to its national and international partners but particularly to the Government of South Sudan, the relevant state governments and the United Nations in order to collectively implement a peace process throughout Sudan and South Sudan.

The Archbishop of Sudan visited the United Kingdom recently. He spent time in the Diocese of Salisbury, which is a partner Diocese to ECS. The Archbishop also had meetings planned with the Foreign Office in London. His visit received virtually no media coverage, apart from an interview on the BBC [Radio 4 Today](#) programme on Friday 2nd December 2011. During the interview with Mike Thomson the Archbishop explained that there was renewed fighting, and that the northern government was attacking

people in Nuba, Blue Nile and Southern Kordofan districts, leading to many people being made homeless. He expressed concern that relief supplies were not reaching the displaced people and that there was danger of severe hunger. He said "we have suffered enough with war", adding that "The international community needs to come in to settle issues in the border areas between North and South."

He was asked about the contingent of 100 United States troops who have been sent to South Sudan, Central African Republic and DR Congo to assist in the struggle against the Lord's Resistance Army. He answered that he "welcomed anyone who will help to bring freedom to the people of South Sudan".

When asked about the possibility of peaceful development in South Sudan, which is already riven with issues of corruption, internal splits and ethnic rivalries, the Archbishop told Thomson that the Sudan Council of Churches had asked him to head the Reconciliation Committee of the People of South Sudan, and he believed that with time the people will understand and be able to work together in order to secure a peaceful future for the country.

The concerns raised by Archbishop Deng are echoed in recent press reports. On 9th December 2011, a *Reuters* report, by Stephanie Nebehay, '[UN fears more clashes between Sudan, S. Sudan](#)' raised fears for the safety of 20,000 refugees:

The United Nations said on Friday it feared further clashes between Sudan and South Sudan and was working hard to move 20,000 refugees further away from the growing insecurity along the border. ... The two countries have traded regular accusations of supporting insurgencies on each other's territory. Their armed forces clashed at Jau in a region claimed by both sides on Wednesday in a rare direct confrontation, which followed air strikes by the Khartoum government's forces last month. ... Melissa Fleming, spokeswoman of the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), told a news briefing. Military confrontations in the border area of Jau have not hit Yida refugee settlement just several kilometres away, "but there are huge fears of attack and these fears have driven many of the refugees who are located there into the bush", she said. "As we reported in November, there was an aerial strike in Yida. We're really concerned that this fighting could cross the border - we're talking about ground fighting now not just aerial," Fleming said. "As a consequence, we are speeding up our efforts to relocate these refugees away from this border," she added. Landmines on the roads were being cleared so as to ensure safe passage deeper into South Sudan. ... South Sudan has received more than 50,000 refugees from Sudan's Blue Nile and Southern Kordofan states in recent months.

Concerns about the impact of outstanding post-secession issues, including the use of pipelines for oil from South Sudan which travel through Sudan, were raised in a statement by EU High Representative Catherine Ashton, as reported by *Sudan Vision* on 12th December 2011, '[EU Urges Sudan, South Sudan to Intensify Efforts to Resolve Remaining Issues](#)'. She urged Sudan and South Sudan to redouble their efforts to resolve all outstanding issues in line with the principle of two viable states:

[She] welcomed the latest round of talks between Sudan and South Sudan in Addis Ababa under the aegis of the African Union High-Level Implementation Panel (AUHIP) but expressed concern that they failed to make more progress, particularly on issues related to the petroleum sector. ... Ashton reiterated Europe's readiness to continue to work with the AUHIP and both governments for the swift resolution of other outstanding post-secession issues, including Abyei, borders, trade, banking, management of water resources and the nationality of South Sudanese in Sudan and Sudanese in South Sudan.

The paucity of media coverage of events in South Sudan continues to be of great concern.

REFERENCES

- Church News Ireland*, 'Sudan – Archbishop Deng backs a secular South Sudan', 2nd September 2011
<http://www.churchnewsireland.org/news/world-news/sudan-archbishop-deng-backs-a-secular-south-sudan/>
- Episcopal Church of the Sudan (ECS)**, 'Communiqué from the ECS Provincial Synod, All Saints Cathedral, Juba', 18th November 2011, <http://sudan.anglican.org/files/1111synodreport.pdf>
- BBC Radio 4 Today*, 'Mike Thomson: Interview with Archbishop Deng' 2nd December 2011
http://news.bbc.co.uk/today/hi/today/newsid_9653000/9653519.stm
- Reuters*, Stephanie Nebehay, 'UN fears more clashes between Sudan, S. Sudan', 9th December 2011,
<http://uk.reuters.com/article/2011/12/09/sudan-un-idUKL5E7N92K220111209>
- Sudan Vision Daily*, KUNA, 'EU Urges Sudan, South Sudan to Intensify Efforts to Resolve Remaining Issues' 12th December 2011, <http://news.sudanvisiondaily.com/details.html?rsnpid=203156>

Nigeria: The cycle of violence continues

Incidents of violence and unrest continue in parts of Northern and Central Nigeria, only occasionally making an impact on the media outside Nigeria. One Islamist group is often accused of being behind the violence. This group is popularly called *Boko Haram* after their catchphrase, which literally means 'books are forbidden', but has the sense of 'No to Western Education'. The group calls itself *Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati wal-Jihad*, which translates as 'People Committed to the Propagation of the Prophet's Teachings and Jihad'. It came to prominence in 2009, when its leader, Mohammed Yusuf, was killed following attacks on police stations in Maiduguri, North Western Nigeria.

The BBC website gives a 'potted history' of the group which includes a time-line of key events.

[Boko Haram: Timeline of terror](#)

2002: Founded
2009: Hundreds killed when Maiduguri police stations stormed
2009: Boko Haram leader Mohammed Yusuf killed
Sep 2010: Freed hundreds of prisoners from Maiduguri jail
Dec 2010: Bombed Jos, killing 80 and blamed for New Year's Eve attack on Abuja barracks
2010-2011: Dozens killed in Maiduguri shootings
May 2011: Bombed several states after president's inauguration
Jun 2011: Police HQ bombed in Abuja
Aug 2011: UN HQ bombed in Abuja
Nov 2011: Dozens killed in north-eastern town of Damaturu

The origins of Boko Haram have been researched by Ephraim Kadala, a lecturer at the Theological College of Northern Nigeria. His findings are presented in *Islamic Fundamentalism in Nigeria* (African Christian Books: Bukuru, Plateau State), published in November 2011. Kadala explains that the late leader of *Boko Haram*, Muhammad Yusuf, who claimed to have never attended a Western-type school, was born in Yobe State in 1970. He went to Saudi Arabia and there studied Wahhabi principles and Islamic philosophy, returning to Nigeria in 2002 and engaging in Quranic teaching and preaching.

It seems that in 2002 a group of students from the University of Maiduguri "dropped out of school, as a result of the preaching of a foreign Islamic scholar who convinced them that western education was unlawful in Islam. They tore up their certificates on TV and denounced western education". They met with Muhammad Yusuf and "convinced him into accepting their ideology; eventually he became their leader. His preaching changed from orthodox preaching to a preaching representing the *Boko Haram* ideology; and subsequently he was excommunicated from the popular Indimi mosque located on Damboa Road in Maiduguri metropolis where he was engaged in preaching".

It is difficult to identify a coherent ideology for *Boko Haram* but Kadala collected their leaflets and press interviews, which give an idea of their aims:

They believe that western education, brought by people who were not Muslims, was not part of the teachings of Prophet Muhammad. They believe that it has a corrupting influence on Muslims and that it is the single major factor militating against the implementation of a complete Islamic system. They also believe that being employed and paid wages is associated with western education, so earning from such work is *haram*. They only encourage trading and are opposed to luxury on the basis that a luxurious person is after the world and not the hereafter. They also oppose the use of televisions, video players and other gadgets which, they say, are distractions from the worship of *Allah*.

The goal of the group is to impose a strict form of *Sharia* and set up a pure Islamic state in the north of Nigeria. The group's aim was to establish an Afghan *Taliban*-style puritanical Islamic government through armed insurrection and cleanse the society of immorality and infidelity.

The secondary objective of the group, was to mobilize all Muslims to prepare for Islamic revolution, *Jihad* and kill any security agent they considered a non-believer. They would make the country ungovernable, kill and eliminate irresponsible political leaders of all leanings, hunt and gun down those who oppose the rule of *Sharia* in Nigeria and ensure that the infidels do not go unpunished (Kadala 2011).

Following Muhammad Yusuf's death, hundreds of his followers were imprisoned in Maiduguri. Many were freed when the Jail was attacked in September 2010. Since that time there has been an increased number of attacks, with the group being blamed. However, it appears that several groups are using the *Boko Haram* identity in order to foment unrest; some are doing this for ideological reasons, others have a political agenda, whilst others are seen as opportunist robbers and thieves.

In November 2011, Ali Sanda Umar Konduga, a former spokesman for *Boko Haram*, was arrested together with Nigerian senator Ali Ndume, who is accused of backing *Boko Haram*. Ndume is a senator belonging to Nigeria's ruling People's Democratic Party, from Borno state, where *Boko Haram* first emerged. He is a member of a presidential taskforce which explored the possibility of opening talks with the Islamist militants.

The BBC reported on 6th December that Konduga has been sentenced to three years' imprisonment and that Ndume denies the charges. The prosecution has withdrawn charges against Mr Ndume in the magistrates' court in Abuja, saying the case would be transferred to the High Court as it was a terrorism trial.

The *Daily Telegraph* of 4th December 2011, in its report '[Nigeria al Qaeda group bomb attack on banks kills three](#)', gives a graphic report on the attack on the town of Azare in Bauchi State:

The attackers armed with heavy machine guns, threw explosives and fired heavy machine guns into a regional police headquarters and an adjoining police station in the town, setting fire to the buildings. ... "They came in a large convoy of cars armed with heavy machine guns and headed to the police area command office and bombed it along with the divisional police station attached to it. The attackers left behind a black banner hanging at the entrance of the police station with the Arabic inscription of 'Allahu Akbar' (God is Great) which made people suspect they were Boko Haram," resident Usman Musa said.

The attackers also bombed and robbed two banks in the town, 140 miles from the state capital Bauchi. Another resident Garba Mohammed said two banks were bombed by the attackers who broke into the vaults. "They emptied the banks' safes and made away with the money."

Mohammed said unexploded bomb canisters littered the banks' premises and policemen kept curious residents away while an anti-bomb squad worked to defuse the explosives.

This Day reporter Doyin Adebunsi in '[Why Security Agencies are Unable to Fight Boko Haram – Minister](#)', 12th December 2011, interviewed the Minister of Police Affairs Caleb Olubolade who described the *Boko Haram* insurgency as "a wake-up call for the country", saying that the Federal Government was procuring new equipment and technology to tackle the sect.

Boko Haram is not the only source of violence as was seen following the presidential elections in April 2011, when some groups in the North resorted to violence when their candidate did not win.

Post Election Violence

There was widespread violence in the north of Nigeria following the presidential elections in April 2011. The *Guardian* report '[Hundreds killed in Nigerian post-election violence](#)' stated that:

Observers said the vote was the most credible in Nigeria for decades, and world leaders have congratulated Jonathan. But Muhammadu Buhari [the former military ruler] says the count was rigged, and his supporters have refused to accept defeat.

The Civil Rights Congress (CRC) said more than 500 people were killed on Monday and Tuesday in three towns – Zonkwa, Kafanchan and Zangon Kataf – in the southern part of Kaduna state, one of the worst-hit areas.

In May, *Human Rights Watch* issued a report '[Nigeria: Post-Election Violence Killed 800](#)', which relates the sequence of events:

The day after the presidential election, held on April 16, Buhari's supporters launched demonstrations in the streets of northern Nigeria. The protests turned violent in 12 northern states

as mobs burned the homes, vehicles, and properties of ruling party stalwarts, most of whom were Muslim, and [of] traditional leaders who were seen to have backed the ruling party.

The rioters also began targeting and killing Christians and members of southern Nigerian ethnic groups, who were seen as supporting the ruling party, and burning churches across the north. As the riots spread, mobs of Christians in predominately Christian communities in Kaduna State retaliated by killing Muslims and burning their mosques and properties.

The report also gives the numbers of Christians and Muslims who were killed:

According to the Christian Association of Nigeria, the umbrella organization representing the majority of Christian churches in Nigeria, at least 170 Christians were killed in the post-election riots, hundreds more were injured, and thousands displaced. The organization also reported that more than 350 churches were burned or destroyed by the Muslim rioters across 10 northern states.

In the predominately Christian towns and villages of southern Kaduna State, including Zonkwa, Matsirga, and Kafanchan, sectarian clashes left more than 500 dead, according to Muslim and Christian leaders interviewed by Human Rights Watch. The vast majority of the victims in these areas were Muslim.

Human Rights Watch estimates that in northern Kaduna State, at least 180 people, and possibly more, were killed in the cities of Kaduna and Zaria and their surrounding suburbs.

The report includes testimony of witnesses to the violence and condemns the climate of impunity which allows violence to continue unchecked:

In southern Kaduna State, [when] a civil servant ... went to the police to file a report [of the violence], the senior police officer at the station told him that "if the police started arresting people now, it would cause more problems." Instead the police advised the man to wait until a commission of inquiry is set up to investigate the violence.

Over the years, the federal and state governments have set up various committees and commissions of inquiry to investigate outbreaks of violence, but the reports from these bodies, and the occasional government white paper, have mostly been shelved. In the absence of accountability and effective redress, communities that have suffered violence frequently resort to vigilante justice and exact revenge by inflicting commensurate harm on members of other communities.

Study on Violence in Jos

The Digest has reported on the situation in Jos on several occasions. The *Church Times* on 18th November 2011, '[Message of peace fails in Nigeria](#)', reports on a new study by the research group Geneva Declaration Secretariat which found that tensions have been worsened by fears of religious dominance and disputes over the allocation of resources.

Its report, [A Deadly Cycle: Ethno-religious conflict in Jos, Plateau State, Nigeria](#), draws on field research conducted in November and December last year, and on interviews with religious leaders. It notes that "people tend to be suspicious of inter-religious dialogue, making it difficult to rebuild trust among communities". The study is based on interviews with local residents, community and religious leaders, local NGO staff, journalists, university researchers, ward heads, and local politicians. It clearly sets out the events and provides a series of maps which help to locate areas of violence, both within Jos city and in the wider Plateau State.

Violence continues, with religious differences often being given as the reasons for the violence, rather than addressing the underlying economic imbalances that have destabilised many areas.

REFERENCES

BBC 'Nigeria's ex-Boko Haram spokesman Konduga jailed', 6th December 2011, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-16052074>

Kadala, E. *Islamic Fundamentalism in Nigeria*, African Christian Books: Bukuru, Plateau State, 2011

The *Daily Telegraph*, 'Nigeria al Qaeda group bomb attack on banks kills three', 4th December 2011, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/africaandindianocean/nigeria/8933950/Nigeria-al-Qaeda-group-bomb-attack-on-banks-kills-three.html>

The Guardian, 'Hundreds killed in Nigerian post-election violence', 24th April 2011, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/apr/24/hundreds-killed-nigeria-post-election-violence>

Human Rights Watch, 'Nigeria: Post-Election Violence Killed 800', 16th May 2011

<http://www.hrw.org/news/2011/05/16/nigeria-post-election-violence-killed-800>

This Day, Doyin Adebunsi, 'Why Security Agencies are Unable to Fight Boko Haram – Minister' 12th December 2011, <http://allafrica.com/stories/201112120501.html>

Church Times, 'Message of peace fails in Nigeria', 18th November 2011,

<http://www.churchtimes.co.uk/content.asp?id=120715>

Geneva Declaration on Armed Violence and Development, 'A Deadly Cycle: Ethno-Religious Conflict in Jos, Plateau State, Nigeria', 10th November 2011,

<http://www.genevadeclaration.org/fileadmin/docs/regional-publications/GD-WP-Jos-deadly-cycle.pdf>