



2.26.2010

NIGERIA Arrests made over mass arson of churches in Northern Nigeria

Several arrests have been made following the burning of at least seven churches in Northern Nigeria's Jigawa State by a mob protesting the death of a Muslim driver at the hands of traffic police.

The commercial tractor driver had failed to stop in Kazaure Town when ordered to do so on 20 February, and was hospitalised after being chased and severely assaulted by a Muslim traffic policeman. The driver died from his injuries the following evening.

On hearing of this death, an angry mob attacked a police station, but after being beaten back, subsequently directed their anger at local churches, destroying buildings belonging to the Anglican, Apostolic, Catholic, Redeemed Christian Church of God, Word of Faith, Deeper Life and Assemblies of God denominations.

Anglican Bishop Yusuf Lamu told Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) that the Anglican building had recently been renovated following an earlier bout of violence and was due for re-dedication in April. He also said the churches were targeted without real cause: "They just view the Church as the enemy, not that the church has done anything".

Other local sources say tension had increased in the area following earlier violence in Jos, Plateau State in January 2010. However, Bishop Lamu insisted that universal condemnation of the violence by local authorities, including the Emir of Kazaure and the Jigawa State government, coupled with the arrests of suspects, had helped to lessen tensions. Rev. Dr. Ibrahim Damina, chairman of the Jigawa Chapter of the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), concurred: "Fortunately no-one died and the tension is finished, but continue to pray for us."

CSW's Chief Executive Mervyn Thomas said: "It is unfortunate that once again churches were targeted for violence following an incident that clearly had nothing to do with them. However, we commend the strong response by the Jigawa State authorities and the swift arrest of perpetrators. We urge them to ensure that justice runs its full course, that those who lost properties during this violence are swiftly compensated, and that efforts are made to ensure such incidents no longer occur".