

Bomb blast in Nigerian capital kills at least 18

David Walsh
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A massive explosion, apparently the result of a suicide bombing, ripped through the United Nations complex in Abuja, the capital of Nigeria, Friday morning, killing at least 18 people and wounding dozens of others.

Reports indicate that a bomb-packed sedan smashed its way through various checkpoints manned by a private security firm, and rammed into the four-story building, leaving a gaping hole and setting off a fire. The Associated Press reported that the bomber “drove the car through the glass front of the main reception area of the building and detonated the explosives, inflicting the most damage possible.”

The building normally houses several hundred people working for 26 UN agencies. Located in Abuja’s central business district, the structure is close to the US embassy and Nigerian national defense headquarters.

“We just saw the blast coming from the building. All the people in the basement were all killed. Their bodies are littered all over the place. I saw about 5 dead bodies,” Michael Ocilaje, a United Nations staff member at the building, told Reuters.

A local police official told the Nigerian media immediately following the blast, “It was a Honda Accord car. The suicide bomber died immediately as the bomb cut him into three. I cannot say how many people are still in the building. The rescue operation is still on.” Many victims were transported to the National Hospital, about half a kilometer away.

The BBC reports that a spokesman for the Islamist group known as Boko Haram claimed responsibility for the attack in a telephone call. The BBC also notes that “A UN official in Nigeria...said the UN had stepped up

security at all its buildings in Nigeria in the past month after receiving information that the UN could be targeted by Boko Haram.”

UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon denounced the lethal explosion as “an assault on those who devote their lives to helping others.” Nigerian president Goodluck Jonathan condemned the bombing as a “barbaric, senseless and cowardly attack” and “a most despicable assault on the United Nations’ objectives of global peace and security.”

Jonathan ordered heightened security across the Federal Capital Territory. The episode will undoubtedly provide Nigerian authorities the opportunity to further crack down on political opposition and popular discontent.

“Boko Haram,” the popular nickname for the group allegedly responsible for the blast, means “Western education is a sin” in the Hausa language spoken in northern Nigeria. The group in its present incarnation was founded in 2002 in Maiduguri, the capital and largest city of Borno State in northeastern Nigeria, a predominantly Muslim region.

Boko Haram has claimed responsibility for numerous attacks, including the bombing of national police headquarters in Abuja in June. Police murdered hundreds of the organization’s members during a crackdown in 2009.

Nigeria, the second largest sub-Saharan economy after South Africa, is beset by social and communal conflicts. The presidential election in April, which resulted in Jonathan’s coming to power, did nothing to resolve the issues, especially the divide between Nigeria’s north and south. His electoral victory sparked

lethal riots in northern Nigeria, where his opponent won a majority of votes.

As the WSWS noted in April: “Jonathan [a Christian] is the first president to come from the Delta region, which produces most of the country’s oil wealth. The communal tensions created by British imperialism and rivalry over the country’s natural resources led to civil war in 1967-70 when the south-eastern provinces seceded to become the Republic of Biafra.”

The oil giants viewed Jonathan’s election as a boon for them. International finance expected him to regularize political life and restructure the Nigerian oil business in the interests of the giant energy firms. The Delta region has been the scene of a long-running insurgency, which has targeted the foreign oil companies, their personnel and facilities. Some 90 percent of government revenue comes from the oil industry.

WikiLeaks published secret cables in 2010 revealing the extent to which the oil companies, Shell Oil in particular, dominate Nigerian political life and make use of the US State Department as their errand boys.

Meanwhile vast layers of Nigeria’s 158 million people live in unspeakable poverty and misery. Per capita GDP in Nigeria is lower today than in 1960 when the country declared independence. Approximately 57 percent of the population live on less than US\$1 per day. Life expectancy is 49 years for men and 50 for women.

The BBC acknowledged in April that the “Inter-faith violence is said to be rooted in poverty, unemployment and the competition for land.”



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