

Nigeria: Muslims kill nearly 1,000 in predominantly Christian town of Gwoza

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via Nigeria death toll higher than reported. h/t TROP*



GWOZA, Nigeria (BP) — The death toll from Boko Haram's takeover of the predominantly Christian town of Gwoza is nearly 1,000, not the 100 included in many reports, Nigerian relations expert Adeniyi Ojutiku told Baptist Press.

The Nigerian military abandoned their weapons and fled Gwoza as Boko Haram attacked Wednesday (Aug. 6), burning government buildings, killing residents and taking hostages. Some residents managed to flee to the mountains bordering Cameroon and are without food or water; others made it 85 miles north to Maiduguri, Associated French Press (AFP) and others reported.

News surfaced just today (Aug. 15) of a separate Aug. 10 attack on the remote village of Doron Baga in northeastern Nigeria, where Boko Haram kidnapped dozens of boys and men, leaving women, girls and young children abandoned there.

Boko Haram has escalated its attacks to a new level, capturing towns and hoisting Boko Haram flags instead of killing residents and fleeing, Ojutiku said. He compared them to the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS). As such, a concerted global effort is needed to conquer the rebels, he said.

Weeks before taking over Gwoza, Boko Haram violently seized Damboa and killed many in the town 22 miles north of Chibok, the site of the April kidnapping of 300 school girls, approximately 223 of which remain missing. Reports number those displaced at more than 15,000, but the number of deaths had not been reported.

“This is a new dimension in this crisis,” Ojutiku said. “A completely new dimension. Now they are following the strategy of ISIS. They attack, they occupy, they hold the town. Now that they have started adopting ISIS methodology, they should be receiving the type of treatment that ISIS is receiving.”

Based on a report Ojutiku received Wednesday, Aug. 13, from a trusted colleague who lives in Gwoza, 997 had been killed and others had been taken hostage. Previous reports were based on information gathered Aug. 6, the day of the attack, when survivors were forced to flee the city of between 50,000 and 70,000 people.



“The terrorists seized a number of residents as hostages and killed nine hundred and ninety seven an eye witness whose mother among the women that are burying the ... bodies confirmed,” the colleague reported to Ojutiku. “The insurgents took over the Emirs (mayor’s) Palace as well as a Government Lodge in Gwoza, and have appointed a replacement for the town’s fleeing Emir. They have hoisted their black flags with Arabic insignia all over Gwoza in a show of their total control of the territory.”

A predawn, Aug. 13 phone call Ojutiku received from Nigeria marked “an unprecedented emergency request for prayers for the inhabitants of the Christian village of Gwoza,” he told Baptist Press.

“The town has ... been under siege of Boko Haram for the past nine days,” Ojutiku said.

Mbitsa, who supports Ojutiku’s grassroots Lift Up Now outreach to Nigeria, is a member of the Church of Christ in Nations on the lower coast of Gwoza, and was away in Maiduguri during the attack. Boko

Haram killed Mbitsa's pastor Musa Ishaya and at least nine members of the Church of the Brethren in the attack, Mbitsa said. He has not heard from many since, as communication towers were destroyed.

"Only my elder brother, I heard from him among my family members," Mbitsa reported. "Some brethren who escaped to mountains and bush for ten days now; only God knows how they are surviving without food, water, etc. Most of the brethren we communicate and get this information from them, their batteries are down."



As Boko Haram blocked exit roads from Gwoza and went door to door killing people, Ojutiku said, Nigerian military officials abandoned their weapons and fled, leaving Boko Haram unchallenged.

"Now these weapons have fallen into the hands of the Boko Haram," Ojutiku said. "A few people were able to escape to the mountainside, just exactly like is happening in northern Iraq. A few people are holding out on the mountains, but most of the people in the village are being slaughtered. There is no communication between Gwoza and other parts of the country."

"I was told many Nigerian soldiers refused to go and confront Boko Haram, because their wives protested. They felt they were just sending their husbands to an untimely death."

New reports corroborated Ojutiku's account. According to AFP, about 300 women and 500 children protested for two days at the gates of a military base in Maiduguri, demanding that their husbands and fathers not be sent to recapture Gwoza, as they did not have proper weapons.

"No weapons for our husbands, no trip to Gwoza or any volatile place," AFP Aug. 12 quoted Thabita John, one of the protesting wives. "We are tired of burying our loved ones."

Boko Haram, seeking to establish Sharia law, had killed 4,239 Christians, moderate Muslims, government officials and civilians in attacks targeting religious communities in Northern Nigeria, advocacy group Jubilee Campaign reported July 29. Hundreds of thousands have been driven from their homes.