

Churches burned in Nigeria; faith leaders condemn violence

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Nairobi, Kenya, April 20 (ENInews)--At least ten churches have been burned in Nigeria, where violence has broken out following the re-election of President Goodluck Jonathan, according to Barnabas Fund, a U.K. Christian charity.

Violence broke out in the predominantly Muslim north when it became clear that Jonathan, a Christian from the south, would win in the presidential election over his key opponent, retired general Muhammadu Buhari, a Muslim from the north. Jonathan was declared the winner on 18 April.

"Barnabas Fund has been told that three churches have been burned in Zaria, two in Wusasa, and five in Katsina. There are also reports of several churches being torched in Kano as riots broke out in the north following Saturday's (16 April) poll," said the Coventry-based organization, which supports Christian communities facing poverty and persecution.

"The Red Cross is reporting that many people have been killed, hundreds injured and thousands displaced," Barnabas Fund said. Christian Solidarity Worldwide, a U.K.-based organization that advocates for religious freedom, also reported on its website that there were a number of attacks on churches and mosques.

Christian, Muslim and political leaders have since united to condemn the violence in which a police station was also torched. More than 100 people are reported dead so far with thousands of others being displaced in a country divided along religious lines with a strongly Muslim north and a mainly Christian south.

"In the last 24 hours, there has been a spate of violence across certain parts of the country. What started mainly as a political protest reportedly included the burning of worship places. This is a sad, unfortunate and totally unwarranted development," Buhari said in statement quoted by the Nigerian press.

"I must say this is a dastardly act that is not initiated by any of our supporters and, therefore, cannot be supported by our party," he said.

The Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) President, Pastor Ayo Oritsejafor and the Sultan of Sokoto, Alhaji Sa'ad Abubakar, pleaded for peace, stressing that religious faiths abhor the killing of innocent people. Uniting under the Nigeria Inter-religious Council of Nigeria (NIREC) the two said: "Resorting to violence is a travesty of our religious teachings and a betrayal of our claim to faith ... NIREC implores all Nigerians to explore constitutional means of seeking redress ... rather than take law into their own hands."

Conflicts between Muslims and Christians have stalked Nigeria for many years. The hostility has been repeatedly brought to the boil in recent years by the presence of radical Islamist groups, according to the Barnabas Fund report.