

State Department names Boko Haram a terrorist organization

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November 15, 2013

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WASHINGTON (RNS) At night, almost one year ago, gunmen from the Islamic extremist group Boko Haram came to Adamu Habila's home in Nigeria.

"Are you ready to die as a Christian?" they asked him after offering a chance to convert to Islam.

"Yes," he replied.

As Habila's wife begged for his life, a gunman shot him in the face, stepped on his body and left Habila for dead.

But the bullet exited the base of his cheek and Habila survived. His 14 Christian neighbors were all killed in the Nov. 28 attack.

"I know, if not because of God, I am a dead man now, 11 months," Habila said at a panel discussion Thursday (Nov. 14). "But, because of his grace, I am still alive in order to testify the goodness of God in my life."

The U.S. Department of State designated Boko Haram and a spinoff group called Ansaru as foreign terrorist organizations Wednesday (Nov. 13).

Boko Haram, which means "Western education is forbidden," is responsible for thousands of deaths in northeast and central Nigeria, according to the State Department.

The group has stated that it desires to establish a Shariah-law theocracy in Nigeria.

Boko Haram has attacked churches, local police stations, the United Nations building in Abuja, local security offices and an agricultural college. In September, a single attack in northeastern Benisheik killed 160 civilians.

Christians are particular targets for the group; an estimated 900 Nigerian Christians have died at the hands of the group in the last year alone, according to the Hudson Institute, which hosted the panel discussion.

About 60 churches have been attacked in the past few years, said Nina Shea, director of the Center for Religious Freedom at the Hudson Institute.

St. Theresa Catholic Church in Mandalla was bombed Christmas Day in 2012 and All Nations Christian Assembly Church in Kaduna was attacked on Easter in 2012. Church attacks have continued this year.