

As Nigeria prepares to install new president, female suicide bombings spike

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May 28, 2015

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(RNS) Nigeria's newly elected president, Muhammadu Buhari, promised during his campaign that he would tackle the militant terrorist group Boko Haram.

On Friday (May 29), he will be sworn into office, just as the extremist group is ramping up its use of female suicide bombers.

Buhari, who is Muslim, replaces Goodluck Jonathan, a Christian from the country's south. Both Christians and Muslims voted for Buhari in April, convinced he could stop the terrorist rampage.

Nigerians fear violence may escalate if female terrorists are deployed because they can hide explosives under their long abayas, gowns worn by some Muslim women.

More women and children have been used as suicide bombers in the first five months of this year than during the whole of last year, according to reports collated by UNICEF.

In 2014, women and girls carried out three-quarters of the attacks in Nigeria, according to UNICEF. Initially, the group used male suicide bombers, mainly, to attack churches, mosques, public places, and government installations.

The phrase Boko Haram means "Western education is forbidden" in the Hausa language.

"Children are not instigating these suicide attacks," said Jean Gough, UNICEF's representative in Nigeria. "They are used intentionally by adults in the most horrific way."

The first female suicide attack was recorded in June 2014.

Many of these include girls and women kidnapped, hidden in the country's Sambisa Forest and released after being radicalized, said John Bakeni, Maiduguri Roman Catholic diocesan secretary.

"The idea," he said of Boko Haram's actions, "is to cause much harm, at least, before the handover or on the day, so that they can re-register their presence."