



AFRICA/NIGERIA - "We cannot accept the shedding of innocent blood," Archbishop of Abuja tells Fides

Abuja (Agenzia Fides) – "We are saddened by the loss of 10 lives and concerned that we are facing a new phenomenon, never before seen in our history: a double attack in the federal capital," Fides has been told by Archbishop John Olorunfemi Onaiyekan, Archbishop of Abuja, the capital of Nigeria, where yesterday, October 1st, two car bombs exploded a few meters from the place where a military parade was being held for the 50th anniversary of national independence.

"Those who, like me, were out watching the parade did not notice anything, and the ceremony continued without interruption," says Archbishop Onaiyekan. "Only around 1/1:30 (local time), when the ceremony ended, we heard the news of what had happened."

Shortly before the explosion, a statement from the MEND (Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta) announced that bombs had been placed in the area near the military parade, encouraging people to evacuate the area. The explosion of the first car bomb was followed minutes later by another explosion, which killed eight people (two others died later in the hospital) and wounded several others.

"The Nigerian press is circulating the hypothesis that it is the work of Al Qaeda behind the twin bombings," said Archbishop Onaiyekan. "It is only a hypothesis, which derives from a U.S. intelligence report sent to Nigerian intelligence officers about a possible interest of Al Qaeda in carrying out attacks in Nigeria. If it were confirmed, this would be a cause for concern as it would introduce the religious dimension into an already complex situation. In the case that the claim of the MEND was deemed credible by the authorities, then I wonder what this group wants to achieve by killing innocent people."

The MEND claims to fight for recognition of the rights of the peoples of the Niger Delta, who not only do not benefit from profits of the oil extracted in the region, but also suffer environmental damage. "We express our sympathy to those who seek a fair distribution of oil revenues, but we cannot, under any circumstances, accept the shedding of innocent blood," said Archb Onaiyekan.

"The Conference of Bishops will release a statement soon about violence in Nigeria, in which they will also discuss the attack yesterday. However, before doing so we want to see the results of preliminary investigations by security authorities," concluded the Archbishop of Abuja. (L.M.) (Agenzia Fides 10/02/2010)