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AFRICA/NIGERIA - "They want to destabilize Nigeria, with attacks on Christian places of symbolic importance," says the Archbishop of Jos

Abuja (Agenzia Fides) - "It was an attack on places symbolic of Christianity. Unlike other incidents in the past that had other causes, the attacks at Christmas have a clear religious motivation," Fides was told by Archbishop Ignatius Ayau Kaigama of Jos, the capital of the Nigerian state of Plateau. On Christmas Eve a series of explosions hit some areas of Jos, causing dozens of deaths and at least 100 injuries. In the following days several Christian places of worship were attacked by gunmen in the area of Maiduguri in northeastern Nigeria, leading to more victims. Responsibility for the attacks was claimed by the Islamist sect Boko Haram. The violence did not spare the federal capital, Abuja, where on New Year's Eve a bomb exploded in a market near a police station causing at least four deaths and dozens of wounded.
"We need to be careful not to rush to conclusions," said Archbishop Kaigama. "So I think that the authorities must conduct a thorough investigation not excluding any avenue, to shed light on the recent events in different areas of Nigeria, from the attacks on Christian churches in Maiduguri, to the incidents in Jos and the bombing in Abuja."
"My impression is that these acts of violence are part of a plan to destabilize Nigeria, and that someone from outside the country is lighting the fire," said Archbishop Kaigama. "It is a feeling based on various facts. I note two fundamental differences between the attacks at Christmas and the clashes that occurred in the area of Jos recently. In the first place, the motivations: as I have explained on other occasions (see Fides 25/03/2010), the riots in and around Jos had a religious component that was mixed with other motives, ie. the frustrations of unemployed youth, the rivalry between pastoralists and farmers, and ethnic tensions between the indigenous and immigrants from other regions of the Country. The attacks at Christmas, rather, have a clear religious significance because they wanted to hit these important symbols of Christianity during the most sacred celebrations, along with Easter. Secondly, in past clashes, bladed weapons and some rifles were used. In this case, rather, explosives were used. The bombs were probably made on site, but I wonder who taught the terrorists how to produce them. So I think that recent events go beyond Nigeria," said the Archbishop of Jos. (LM) (Agenzia Fides 04/01/2011)

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