



AFRICA/NIGERIA-"The Muslim community isolates the extremists" asks the Archbishop of Abuja, where an attack struck the national headquarters of the police

Abuja (Fides Service) - "It is a very worrying development, because it is the first time in the history of Nigeria where a suicide bombing is carried out followed almost immediately by the claiming of responsibility on behalf of the bombers", says His Excellency Mons. John Olorunfemi Onaiyekan to Fides, Archbishop of Abuja, capital of Nigeria, yesterday, June 16, two people were killed in a car in the car park of the federal police headquarters. The attack was claimed by the radical Islamic sect Boko Haram.

"This group is not unknown. Nigerians expect the government to do its duty to guarantee the security of the country towards a group that has sided against the whole police system of the nation", said Mgr. Onaiyekan, emphasizing the blatant attack: "the car bomb was placed in the police chief's car park. How was this possible? This shows the need of a thorough security system investigation".

The Archbishop of Abuja also notes that "it is said that there is an international connection with foreign fundamentalists. A Boko Haram spokesman said that some of their followers, who had gone to Somalia to be trained by the local extremists, have returned to Nigeria. These men are scattered all over Nigeria to sow fear and terror".

"The extremists are a challenge to all Nigerians and especially for the Nigerian Muslim community. No Muslim can continue to assert that terrorism has nothing to do with Islam. I am a man of peace and dialogue, I always tell my Muslims that they should isolate the extremists that are present in their communities. It is not enough to say 'they do not belong to us', concrete steps to identify and isolate those who are not in line with their activities with the good of the country and the good of Islam itself are needed", remarked Mgr. Onaiyekan.

The sect is particularly active in the north. A few days ago, the Cathedral of Maiduguri was seriously damaged in an attack claimed by Boko Haram (see Fides 14/6/2011). "Our churches are also affected because they are a very easy target: buildings are clearly visible and unprotected. We do not deploy armed soldiers around our churches, which are places of worship open to everyone", says the Archbishop of Abuja.

"Looking at the overall situation of the country, we must recognize that we have serious problems", continues Mgr. Onaiyekan. "We have just concluded the presidential, parliamentary and local elections, and however imperfect they may seem, gerrymandering here and there, evidence of a general improvement of the political system was considered. Unfortunately, this slow improvement is not shared by all. The majority of the population still patiently faces problems of poverty, unemployment, lack of facilities, nevertheless many Nigerians are getting impatient and are tempted to resort to violence. But this is not the solution, because violence is only the expression of anger. This, however, should make us understand that we are not simply facing a matter of public policy, to arrest the criminals, but we must ensure better living conditions for people." Mgr. Onaiyekan concludes his talk with a request: "I ask the prayers of all so Nigeria can find the path to peace and national harmony".

(L.M.) (Agenzia Fides 06/17/2011)