



AFRICA/NIGERIA - "Terrorism threatens us all, Muslims and Christians, but together we can overcome it" says to Fides the Archbishop of Abuja

Abuja (Agenzia Fides) - "I hope that these people have not died in vain, the Nigerians are realizing that terrorism threatens us all, Christians and Muslims," says to Fides His Exc. Mgr. John Olorunfemi Onaiyekan, Archbishop of Abuja, the federal capital of Nigeria, where at Christmas at least 35 people were killed in an attack that hit the church of Santa Teresa, in the district of Madalla. Also at Christmas other bombs exploded in some churches in other parts of Nigeria, including a Pentecostal church in Jos, capital of Plateau State. The attacks were attributed to the Islamic Boko Haram sect.

"The day after Christmas, when I went to the site of the attack along with the Nuncio, in the presence of the Minister of the Interior, I took the opportunity to launch a strong appeal through the local press to the Islamic leadership of Nigeria to do something " Mgr. Onaiyekan tells Fides. "Even if the Muslim religious leaders continue to assert that members of Boko Haram do not belong to true Islam, there must however recognize that these are Muslims, it does not matter whether they are good or bad, and that they have the greatest opportunity to identify them and demonstrate that they are doing it. "

"A lot of importance was given to my statement – Mgr. Onaiyekan continues - and this has attracted several comments in the Nigerian media. A number of important organizations and Islamic groups are now condemning the attacks. I just received a call from a Muslim group who visited the injured in hospital and asked me to visit the church of Santa Teresa.

"It is no time to say whether we are Muslims or Christians, we have to face the problem as Nigerians who all live under the threat of these people. Among the dead there were also Muslims. The bomb exploded in the street, opposite the church, and affected not only the faithful who came out of the Mass but also passers-by. I personally prayed and blessed a man who was seriously injured while he was in the car at the time of the explosion. And this person was a Muslim, " says the Archbishop of Abuja.

Mgr. Onaiyekan reveals that the local Church had organized a security service to protect the places of worship.

"These brave young men set up check posts at the two entrances of the road leading to the church of Santa Teresa, checking every car that passed. The bomber's car refused to stop. The boys followed it up in front of the facade of the church, and managed to block it. While they were arguing with the driver, he detonated the bomb. Therefore it was a suicide bombing. Among the dead there is one of our young people working for the surveillance, and at least 3 members of the police, including a Muslim, " says Mgr. Onaiyekan.

"This is terrorism, which spares no one," underlines the Archbishop. "When these people say they want an Islamic State, it is not a State that gives more freedom to the Muslims. We know what they mean by Islamic State, we have the example of the Somalia of the Shabab. I believe that we have finally managed to make it clear to the vast majority of our fellow Muslims that terrorism carried out by the Boko Haram is not only against Christians. Only together, Christians and Muslims, we can go far, " concluded Mgr. Onaiyekan. (L.M.) (Agenzia Fides 28/12/2011)