

Kidnapped Nigerian priest freed from custody

The Nigerian priest who was abducted by gunmen last week has been freed. Fr. Nicholas Oboh was kidnapped last week in the southwest region of Nigeria and was freed on Feb. 18 in the evening, his diocese reported.

"I am pleased to inform this house that our priest who was kidnapped last week Thursday, Rev. Nicolas Oboh, has regained his freedom," a spokesman for the Diocese of Uromi told Nigerian Catholic leaders in a WhatsApp message.

"He was released this evening," the spokesman said. "'Many thanks for your prayers and goodwill."

The Uromi diocese is expected to release additional details about the priest's release.

Nigerian media reported that several children were kidnapped at the same time Oboh was abducted Feb. 13. The condition and circumstances of those children are not yet known.

Oboh's kidnapping is the latest in a series of abductions and killings in Nigeria which have involved Catholics and other Christians; clergy, seminarians, and lay people.

Earlier this week, suspected Islamist militants in Borno state staged an arson attack which killed 30 people, including a pregnant mother and her baby. The attack also destroyed 18 vehicles filled with food supplies for the region.

Seminarian Michael Nnadi, 18, was killed in late January, weeks after he and three other seminarians were abducted from their seminary in Nigeria. The seminarians kidnapped with Nnadi have been released, but one is facing life-threatening injuries.

Also in January, Rev. Lawan Andima, a local Government Chairman of the Christian Association of Nigeria and the married father of nine children, was beheaded by Boko Haram.

Archbishop Augustine Obiora Akubeze of Benin City said Andima was killed "simply because he was a Christian."

In a Feb. 7 interview with Aid to the Church in Need, Archbishop Akubeze, who is president of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria, warned that "The current situation in Nigeria reflects an unnecessary, unwarranted and self-inflicted tension. A politically polarized nation."

"The President of Nigeria recently stated that he was shocked at the unabated killing of Nigerians, who are mostly Christians. Many Nigerians wonder whether the president lives in a parallel universe," Akubeze stated.

"How can he be surprised at this time? After some of us have attended mass burials of Christians killed by Boko Haram? The government is certainly not doing enough to protect both Christians and Muslims."

Boko Haram, an Islamist militant group that has sworn allegiance to the Islamic State, has been active in Nigeria for years. While the group has attacked both Muslims and Christians in the past, the archbishop said that recent attacks have focused on the killing and kidnapping of Christians.

Akubeze said that the situation is dire and getting worse.

"One area that I think the Western nations and the media can be of great help is to cover the stories of these atrocities in Nigeria," Akubeze reflected.

"The number of killings is just mind boggling. Maybe with significant Western coverage, the Government of Nigeria may be put under pressure to act."