Travails of Bomb Blast Survivors

Contributed by Chimezie Enyiocha Thursday, 19 April 2012

Survivors of the Easter Day bomb blast in Kaduna, last week, and their relations relive their agony in the hospitals where the victims were taken to for treatment

When Augustine Vincent and Aaron Idiawaje left their house in Kaduna, early morning Sunday, April 8, for Easter service at Christ Embassy Church on Kachia Road, they had no premonition that Boko Haram, the Islamic fundamentalist sect, would mar the day's celebration of the resurrection of Jesus. With abundant joy in their hearts, they headed for church on a commercial motorcycle popularly called Okada. But their joy turned into nightmare when suddenly a vehicle in front of them exploded and the entire atmosphere was covered by a thick cloud. Both Vincent and Idiawaje managed to jump down from the motorcycle and sustained serious injuries. But the commercial motorcyclist, who was conveying them to church, was not that lucky. He died on the spot as his motorcycle rammed into the bomb-laden car which Boko Haram suicide bomber had used to unleash mayhem on residents of Kaduna that day. When Newswatch met them at Barrau Dikko Hospital, Kaduna, where they were receiving treatment, Idiawaie simply described their survival as a miracle. &Idquo;It is the hand of God that saved us; the blood of Jesus saved us. Truly, we were going to church to celebrate the resurrection of Jesus Christ and that was why we were saved from the forces of darkness. Indeed, it was a close shave because the car exploded right in front of us," he said. Aliyu Mansur, 20, another victim of the blast did not know what hit him. It was on his hospital bed at Barau Dikko Hospital that his relatives told him about the bomb blast. Mansur, who is also a commercial motorcycle operator, was unconscious and only recovered consciousness at the hospital. &ldquo: I just saw myself in the hospital, " he said, explaining that all he could remember was that he was coming from Barnawa in the southern part of the metropolis with a passenger and was heading to Junction Road where the blast occurred. " I never knew that I was going close to death. After dropping the passenger, I decided to turn at the Lagos Street roundabout back to Barnawa where I used as my route. Very close to Junction Road, I heard a loud explosion and I fell down. How I was taken to this hospital still remains a mystery to me. I am still feeling pains all over my body, " he said. Another victim, Nura Gwarzo, an indigene of Kano State, and a 400-level mechanical engineering student of Bayero University, Kano, BUK, said he was on holidays in Kaduna, and decided to engage in commercial motorcycle operation to raise money for his school fees. He recalled that on that day, he set out to look for his daily bread as early as 6.am, not knowing that ill luck was to befall him. "I dropped a passenger at Junction Road and was going back to Sarduana Crescent from where I came when I heard a loud explosion and I fell down. I lost consciousness immediately. That was what I could remember until the following day when I regained consciousness and I found out that I am in the hospital with pains all over my body, " he said. Gwarzo, who is the ninth child out of 27 children in his family, told Newswatch that his left legs and arm were seriously affected by the blast. &Idquo; Although I was injured, I am very happy that I am alive to tell the story of what happened to me. I believe that I will get well soon." Suleiman Yusuf, 50, a native of Karayei local government area of Kano State, who sells fruits with wheel barrow at the Junction Road, had his back and face shattered by the blast. Yusuf said he was at the spot assembling his goods for the day's business when he suddenly heard a loud sound. "At a point, my ear drums were blocked and I couldn' thear anything again. I was on the floor helpless when I noticed that I was in a pool of blood. That was the only thing that I could remember before I saw myself here in the hospital with bandages all over me.&rdguo; Uchenna Oguadimma, a trader and native of Uruala in Ideato local government Area of Imo State, who was equally a victim, said he came to his shop that morning to pick his sporting boots when the bomb exploded, shattered his shop and his Toyota Camry car parked in front of it. The blast affected his abdomen. Oguadimma, who was still writhing in pains at the Ahmadu Bello University Teaching Hospital, ABUTH, Shika, where he was to undergo a surgery to enable the doctors remove pieces of iron inside his stomach, told Newswatch that it was a good Nigerian who put him inside his car and rushed him to St Gerald Hospital where he was first treated. It was the doctors at St Gerald Hospital who referred him to ABUTH, Shika, for surgery because of the delicate nature of the wound. Mohammed Sani Sidi, director-general of the National Emergency Management Agency, NEMA, who visited the bomb blast victims in the various hospitals last week, said that the agency would foot the hospital bills of those receiving treatment in those hospitals. But Emeka Orji, a close friend of Oquadimma complained that despite the promise of the director-general of NEMA that the agency would pay the hospital bills of the victims, the doctors at ABUTH collected money for the treatment of his friend. According to him, they were asked to pay money for the screening of the blood which they voluntarily donated to save their friend's life. "We paid N5,000 at St Gerald for them to give us blood, when we got to Shika, myself and another friend donated blood which they wanted to transfuse to Oquadimma. But surprisingly, we were asked to pay N300 each for the screening of the blood. They also collected money from us to purchase drugs, bed sheet and other items." Orij said. The sad tales of the victims and their relations are as a result of the blast which marred the Easter celebrations for residents of Kaduna. The suicide bomber in a vehicle moved towards the ECWA Good News Church on Gwari Road when security agents who mounted road blocks along the route accosted and turned him back. While he was driving away, the bomb went off at the Junction Road, near the Stadium Roundabout, killing the bomber. Immediately the blast happened, some of the residents of Kaduna, who have been living in the fear of Boko Haram after a similar incident in the past and those who were on their way to church service scurried to their various homes in fear. Others already in their homes stayed indoor. About 42 persons were killed. Most of the people who died in the explosion were commercial motorcycle operators, fuel hawkers, petty traders, almajiri beggars and commuters waiting for buses at the bus stop. The highest number of those who lost their lives were commercial motorcycle operators. The Amalgamated Commercial Motorcycle Owners and Riders Association of

Nigeria, ACOMORAN, Kaduna branch, claimed that they lost more than 100 of its members. Nasiru Mamman, secretary general of ACOMORAN, described the incident as a &ldguo; sad day, a very dark day for the union along Junction Road.&rdguo: The union had called for an emergency meeting to take stock of the actual number of members who died in the explosion. Danjuma Isah, the Kano Road branch chairman of the union, was in tears as he narrated how most of their members who lost their lives to the blast were burnt beyond recognition. " The bomb that claimed the lives of our members is unfortunate. They died when they came to look for their daily bread and that was very painful. Most of our members couldn't work today because they are very sad; some of us have travelled to our states because of fear. Families of our members have been going to hospitals in search of their dear ones. You cannot even identify some of the dead because they were burnt beyond recognition, &rdguo; he said. One of the people who have been unable to identify or find the corpses of their relatives is Amina Iliya, 22, and a mother of four, who lost her husband in the blast. Unable to control the tears that rolled down her cheeks, she said: " My husband was the bread winner of the family. I don't have any job, how do I take care of my children? I am finished". She lamented that the family has not even been able to identify the corpse of her late husband due to the way the blast roasted him. Despite the sorrow of the victims of the blast, some Okada riders in the state who are still angry over the death of their colleagues have vowed to stage a protest should the government refuse to compensate the families of their deceased members. There have been conflicting reports as to who the bombers targeted and how the explosion actually occurred. While eye witnesses said that ECWA Good News Church on Gwari Road was the target, Mohammed Jinjiri Abubakar, commissioner of Police Kaduna State Command, said intelligence report on the incident indicated that the two suspected vehicles heading towards Sabo Tasha and Kakuri areas exploded while on transit. " The two vehicles were pursued by one of our detectives, Corporal Francis Marcus, and then suddenly one of the vehicles hit the other, thereby causing serious bomb explosion between the two vehicles on Junction Road by Sarduana Crescent in Kaduna. The bomb explosion was massive which resulted in the death of the suicide bomber and five passersby, injured, " Abubakar said. The explosion destroyed the buildings of First Bank branch at Junction Road, Marhaba Hotels and the popular Fina White Hotel. Stephen Ukah, the manager of Fina White Hotel, put the cost of the damages recorded at the hotel at more than N15 million. Also about eight cars and 50 motorcycles were also destroyed. John Egaji, a security man at Marhaba Hotel, who sustained an injury from the blast, recalled that the sect had earlier warned that they would bomb some places in the north during the festive period. Although security agencies in the state were put on alert and were drafted to all the churches in the state, he said &ldguo; the bombers caught the security operatives unawares despite all the road blocks that were mounted in all the major roads and streets of Kaduna."