

## Hunters Kill Seven Self-Styled Taliban Extremists

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KANO, Nigeria, Jan 8 (AFP) - Nigerian huntsmen have shot dead seven Islamic radicals who were fleeing a military crackdown on a group inspired by the Afghan Taliban militia, a local reporter who saw the bodies told AFP on Friday.

On Tuesday 13 members of the Muhajirun sect arrived in the village of Sandiya in a remote area of northeastern Borno State, preaching Islam and demanding transport after their vehicle broke down, Abdullahi Bego said.

They shot dead the leader of a local group of hunters, triggering a bloody confrontation in which seven of the Islamic gang were shot dead. The remaining six fled into the bush, Bego said, citing witnesses.

Police in the Borno State capital Maiduguri on Thursday showed journalists seven bodies and 13 seized AK-47 assault rifles, he added.

The Muhajirun are a radical group of Nigerian Muslim university graduates inspired by Afghanistan's former Taliban regime. Their aim is to set up an "Islamically pure" state in northern Nigeria.

They style themselves on the Taliban, and have recently raised their movement's black flag in the Kanamma and Geidam areas of the northeastern state of Yobe.

Last week Nigerian soldiers launched a crackdown on the Muslim radicals after two police officers were killed during three weeks of clashes between the group and security forces.

Officials say 47 members of the Muhajirun been arrested so far and five killed, including their leader.

But the group was thought to be 200-strong and the gang is thought to have broken up into small groups and dispersed through the arid savanna along Nigeria's northern border with Niger.

Seven of those arrested were attempting to cross the frontier, officials said.

Nigeria is Africa's most populous country and slightly more than half of its 126 million citizens are Muslims, most of them living in 12 northern states.

Although the vast majority of Nigeria's Muslims now live peacefully under the country's secular federal constitution and Christian leader, President Olusegun Obasanjo, simmering ethnic and sectarian tensions sometimes erupt into

bloody clashes.

Riots between Muslims and Christians have killed thousands of Nigerians since the end of military rule in 1999, while the reintroduction of Islamic Sharia law has stoked tensions in northern cities.