

Boko Haram 'holding' kidnapped French priest

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AFP

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Father Georges Vandenbeusch, a French priest who was seized from his parish in northern Cameroon earlier this week, is being held by Nigeria's Boko Haram, a source from within the Islamist group said on Friday.

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Nigeria's Boko Haram is holding Father Georges Vandenbeusch, a French Catholic [priest who was seized](#) from his parish in northern Cameroon earlier this week, a source within the group said on Friday.

The [United States formally designated](#) Boko Haram and Ansaru, another militant Islamist group based in Nigeria, as foreign terrorist organisations on Wednesday, making it a crime for any US national to provide them with material support.

Father Vandenbeusch, 42, was [abducted](#) from his parish in Nguetchewe, a settlement just 10 kilometers (six miles) from Cameroon's border with Nigeria, late on Wednesday after gunmen stormed the church to demand money. The priest had just enough time to [alert the French embassy](#) by phone before he was seized from his private room. His abductors then marched him barefoot across the village before fleeing on motorbikes.

"I can confirm that the French priest is in the hands of mujahideen (fighters) from Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati wal-Jihad [Boko Haram's Arabic name], who carried out the operation that was coordinated with Ansaru," the source, who demanded anonymity, told the AFP news agency.

Ansaru has claimed responsibility for kidnapping other foreign nationals in the past.

Vandenbeusch's abduction comes nine months after [Boko Haram seized a French family](#) in the same area of northern Cameroon before freeing them in April.

French nationals targeted

A French security analyst said that Vandenbeusch may have been targeted, in part, because he was French.

"This was premeditated, targeting a Catholic priest who was French because we are in Mali, and in Mali it's considered that we are soiling Muslim lands," said former intelligence officer Louis Caprioli, who now advises for the private security firm GEOS.

Two French journalists who worked for RFI were killed in Mali earlier this month by militants claiming to represent al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, or AQIM, in retaliation for France's operations in Mali. Security experts have said the killings may have resulted from a botched kidnapping.

Vandenbeusch's abduction is the latest in a series of attacks on French targets in West Africa since France launched a military intervention in January to oust Islamists who had taken over most of northern Mali.

Nigeria has said that the far north of Cameroon is being used by Boko Haram militants to transport weapons and hide from a six-month-long military offensive to oust them. Abuja has appealed to Cameroon to tighten security along the border between the two countries.

(FRANCE 24 with wires)