Nigeria: 14 churches destroyed

The police commissioner of the central Nigerian state of Kwara says his forces have been stationed around churches in the capital Ilorin following the destruction of 14 churches in the city.

Muslim youths are suspected of being responsible for the attacks.

The commissioner, Antony Sawyer, said some 3,000 youths were involved, and several arrests had been made.

He said an investigation was under way to establish the motive behind the attacks, which began late on Saturday. No injuries were reported.

A prominent Islamic preacher in Ilorin who visited the destroyed churches condemned the attacks as "un-Islamic".

The incidents were "a thing that no faithful Muslim will associate himself with", Alhaji Ali Agan told Nigeria's Guardian newspaper.

Gates broken

Pastor Shola Kolapo of the United Missionary Church of Africa in Ilorin was quoted by the Vanguard newspaper as saying that he and two others inside the church heard shouting at about 2300 local time.

"Before we knew what was happening, they had started breaking the gate with different kinds of weapons. We had to run away, jump over the fence to take refuge," he said.

Nigeria's population is composed mainly of northern Muslims and southern Christians. Ilorin lies in the centre, where Christians and animists are in the majority.

Correspondents say religious tensions in Nigeria have heightened following recent moves to declare Sharia law in several northern states.