

Deadly shooting at Ivory Coast hotel claimed by Al-Qaida

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Al Qaeda's North African branch has claimed responsibility for a terror attack on an Ivory Coast beach resort on Sunday in which 16 people, including four Europeans, were killed.

Hamed Bakayoko, Ivory Coast's interior minister, said foreign citizens from France, Germany, Burkina Faso, Mali and Cameroon were among the victims. Mr Bakayoko also told state television that authorities were in possession of a mobile phone they hoped would prove a valuable lead in finding those responsible for the attack.

Beachgoers were filmed screaming and running into nearby hotels for cover as up to four balaclava-clad gunmen sprayed bullets indiscriminately while shouting "Allahu Akbar".

Witnesses described the attackers as African, armed with Kalashnikovs and grenade belts and dressed in casual clothes who shot at "anyone they could find" as they "calmly" walked along the packed beachfront of Grand Bassam, 25 miles east of the capital Abidjan at lunchtime on Sunday.

A worker in one of the hotels on the beach in Grand Bassam told the Telegraph by telephone that he had seen at least six bodies on the sand and two male attackers armed with Kalashnikovs.

The bodies were those of white Europeans, Africans and Lebanese, said Lacina Ouattara, who works at the Wharf Hotel. "I saw two men with guns. Kalashnikovs. Their faces were bare and I could see they were Africans. They were in

their thirties and were dressed in civilian clothes,” said Mr Ouattara. “They shouted Allahu Akhbar as they moved along the beach.”

Antoine Glaser, a top expert on French-speaking Africa, said: “The target was clearly France.”

“Grand-Bassam is the historic capital and the signs of France’s colonial presence are numerous – a French cemetery, old colonial houses, former missionary schools. It is the very symbol of France in Ivory Coast.”

Added to that, he said it took place very close to the base for 600 soldiers there to support the “Sahel G5” group of African states who are coordinating anti-terror operations. “It is clearly for the jihadists a way of saying France is not welcome in this region”.

Dr Robert Besseling, of the Exx Africa business risk intelligence group, said the French security services had been warning “for at least a year” of an imminent attack on the relatively affluent West African nations of Ivory Coast and Senegal. He said that al-Qaeda in the Islamic Magreb, which claimed responsibility, is expanding its operations southwards from its traditional Sahel heartland and adopting the more aggressive tactics of Islamic State in the Levant (Isil).

The Foreign Office said they were “urgently” trying to establish whether any Brits were involved.