Islamic State claims Berlin Christmas market attack; attacker remains at large

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Berlin: Dreaded terror group Islamic State has claimed responsibility for Monday's horrific attack on Berlin Christmas market that killed at least 12 persons.

 Officials visit the site of the attack in Berlin

 The claim of responsibility carried on the Islamic State group's Amaq news agency described the man seen fleeing from the truck as 'a soldier of the ISIS' who carried out the attack in response to calls for targeting citizens of the Crusader coalition.

 Germany is not involved in anti-ISIS combat operations, but has Tornado jets and a refuelling plane stationed in Turkey in support of the coalition fighting militants in Syria, as well as a frigate protecting a French aircraft carrier in the Mediterranean, among other assets.

 The claim of responsibility came not long after German prosecutors said they had released a man picked up near the scene of the attack, initially suspected of driving the truck.

 The man, a Pakistani citizen who came to Germany last year, was taken into custody based on a description from witnesses of a suspect who jumped out of the truck and fled after the attack. Even before his release, officials had expressed doubt the man was behind the attack.

 "We may still have a dangerous criminal out there," warned Berlin police chief Klaus Kandt, whose office urged people to be particularly vigilant and report suspicious movement using a special hotline.

 Though Germany had not seen any successful mass-casualty Islamic extremist attacks until Monday, attempts and recent attacks in neighbouring France and Belgium had made many feel it was inevitable.

 The Monday night attack on the popular market by the Kaiser Wilhelm Memorial Church in the heart of former West Berlin left 12 dead and 48 injured — the first mass casualty attack by Islamic extremists carried out on German soil.

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