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Six feared dead as religious crisis rocks Taraba

WEDNESDAY, 14 JULY 2010 00:14 NIGERIAN COMPASS



AT least, six persons were feared dead yesterday and properties worth several millions of naira destroyed in Wukari town, the headquarters of Wukari Local Government Area of Taraba State.

It was as a result of a violent protest from some youths believed to be Christians and opposed to the building of a mosque within the premises of the Police Area Command in Wukari.

The Nigerian Compass learnt that the aggrieved youths came out in their hundreds to pull down the mosque, which they claimed was built on a public land.

The demolition of the place of worship triggered a retaliation from the Muslim community, who in turn destroyed a number of churches, including the Apostolic Church, Wukari, thus aggravating the crisis across the town.

Sources said that the chairman of the Taraba State Traditional Council, the Aku Uka of Wukari, Dr. Shakaru Angyu, had warned the Area Commander against the building of the mosque.

The structure was at the roofing level before the youth levelled it yesterday.

Eyewitness accounts said the crisis was unprecedented in the history of the ancient town, which the Nigerian Compass learnt had never witnessed religious clashes before.

The accounts bemoaned the alleged involvement of some security operatives in the area, who were accused as the masterminds of the crisis.

The Commissioner of Police, Mr. Aliyu Yusuf, confirmed the incident but said the situation was under control as a team of mobile police men have been assigned to keep surveillance.

The police chief also confirmed that construction of a mosque within the Area Command premises triggered the crisis but said only one person dead.

When the Nigerian Compass visited Wukari, the hostility had subsided and heavily-armed mobile policemen were seen on patrol.

But all ware points and business premises were locked while people were seen scurrying to safety.

The residents were soaked in the fear of the unknown yesterday especially as it was being rumoured that Muslims from neighboring states of Bauchi, Adamawa, Plateau and Gombe were mobilising to give the Wukari Muslims a solidarity backing.

But the state government rose to the occasion, staging series of meetings.

One of such meetings was chaired in Jalingo, the state capital by the Deputy Governor, Sani Danladi and the Chief of Staff, Gave Yawe, on how to contain the crisis.


The Chief Press Secretary to Governor, Suntai Hassan Mijiyuwa, told reporters on phone that the government was committed to the safety of lives and properties of the citizenry.

According to him, the government, which had appealed to the peace loving residents of Wukari to go about their normal business, will do everything to bring the culprits to book.


One of the Christian refugees, who declined to identify himself, alleged that the area commander who was posted to Wukari to maintain peace, was responsible for the first-ever religious crisis in Wukari town.

"Imagine how the commander wanted to impose a mosque on the people of Wukari, a Christian-dominated community," the refugee said.


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