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3 die scrambling for anniversary rice

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BEN UKEJI, Abuja

Tragedy struck in Abuja yesterday at the International Conference Center (ICC), as three young men died while scrambling to have a share of about 10 trailer load of rice donated by the First Lady, Dame Patience Jonathan.

The rice was being distributed to residents of the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) as part of the 50th independence celebration.

Mrs. Jonathan was said to have given about 10,000 bags of rice which was shared on Wednesday to thousands of residents of FCT. .

However, trouble began yesterday when thousands of youths who besieged the venue for the sharing began to protest the non availability of the commodity which according to them was meant to be shared among the downtrodden but was carted away by some top government functionaries.

The protesters who were singing war songs were however, prevented by the police, civil defence corps, state security services and other security agencies from gaining entry into the ICC.

An eye witness told Daily Champion that the three young men died after inhaling the tear gas used in dispersing them by the police.

Daily champion gathered that the protesters including taxi and bus drivers, food sellers, as well some students from the University of Abuja, among others were angry when they discovered that some top government officials who were sharing the rice connived with the security agencies and made away with about 250 bags of rice from the venue.

They were locked out of the place by the security officials guiding the place and their protest caused traffic jam on Nnamdi Azikiwe road as they insisted on collecting their own share of the rice.

Incidentally, Minister of State, FCT, Navy Captain Caleb Olubolade, who was on inspection tour of facilities for the golden jubilee celebrations, ran into the angry mob.

The minister who was supposed to inspect the conference centre ahead of today's celebration, however, called for a table on which he stood to address the crowd which kept shouting its Jonathan or nobody; give us our rice, we will die here.

While addressing the youths who were earlier dispersed with teargas by policemen, Captain Olubolade appealed to them to be calm even as he promised to supply them his own rice.

He urged the leaders of the youths to supply him with the list of those present according to their area councils, promising that he would also work to engage them in productive activities.

He lamented that the action of the youths was a reflection of frustration and unemployment and that it was part of inherited problems which the present administration must brace up to provide lasting solutions to.

He said: The large turnout of youths looking for what to feed on as they learnt about rice distribution will continue to come but what is important is that these are inherited problems we have to live with and we cannot leave them on their own. That's why I came down to talk to them because they are our people.

If we are able to manage them well, we will get the best from them and that is why I said they should bring a list. I will give them the little I have and look for a way of creating employment for them.

If we are able to manage them well, we will get the best from them and that is why I said they should bring a list of them. I will give them the little I have and look for a way of creating employment for them in the area councils so that the influx we saw there will not occur again. If we keep them at the area councils where they are coming from, they won't bother to come into the city do what they are doing.

That's the reflection that the area councils need to accommodate

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them in the Nigeria @50 celebration so that they will be part of the celebration. I will give them a viewing centre in each of the area councils so that if they can't come into the city to witness physically, they will still be comfortable under the care of their various councils. This will temporarily solve the problem.

◆ We will try to make them productive, depending on their skills in manual labour, farming, and other areas. They will work and earn a living. I believe strongly that when they begin to earn a living their lives will be better and will have no reason to gather like this because of food. We will try to reach out to them◆.

On whether the nation has any cause to celebrate, he said that the nation has a huge population, saying ◆150 million people are quite a large population. The greatest problem is unemployment that we have. That is the reason for what you saw at the ICC this(yesterday) afternoon◆.

Comments for 3 die scrambling for anniversary rice

It is time our leaders stopped deceiving themselves as well as getting their priorities wrong. The blood of these youngsters who lost their lives will be on their heads because what they needed was jobs which the government has failed to provide and not free rice. They have been unable as a government to create the enabling environment for these youths to be gainfully employed and she is sharing 10,000 bags of rice. Where did she get the money? Is the President's wife drawing salary from government? The looting and corruption continues. Their reward awaits them here on earth.

Submitted by ugo on 01 October 2010

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