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Nigeria: 22 Die in Plateau Land Dispute

Daily Trust (Abuja)

29 October 2008

Posted to the web 29 October 2008

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Aisha Umar

Twenty two people died while many others sustained injuries in a clash over land between the Kwila and Tarok communities in Kadarko district, Wase local government area of Plateau state.

The Acting District Head of Kadarko, the Ponzi Suku Mr. Seldum Nimmak told Daily Trust in Jos yesterday that ten people were killed by thugs in the bush while eleven people were killed in a road accident on their way to Taraba State after they were chased away by the thugs terrorising the area. He said another seven people were wounded and were admitted in hospital. Three of them are in critical condition, he said. The Ponzi Suku said the problem started when the paramount ruler of Kadarko chieftdom, Lot Nden Ponzi Kadarko asked some Tarok youths to harvest the maize planted by the Kwila Community in a farm given to them by the Emir of Wase.

As a result of that, he said a fracas occurred which led to the death of one person and rendered hundreds of people homeless. The acting district head, who showed Daily Trust 127 pages of different petitions filed by twelve communities in the area against the paramount ruler Lot Nden, accused him of sponsoring youths to burn houses in nine villages.

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He said the paramount ruler does not respect law and order in the area because he refuses to obey the order by Governor David Jonah Jang which dissolved the chiefdoms created by former governor Chief Joshua Dariye's administration.

However, an aide to the paramount ruler Lot Nden, Mr Nantim Kundul Wuyep dismissed all the allegations levelled against the chief. He said "no leader will agree with violence and misunderstanding among his subjects, so all they are saying is not true because Honourable Lot is a peaceful man."

Wuyep also said "The situation started when Kwela people in a dastardly fashion slaughtered one Tarok boy in the farm and scattered and mutilated his body into pieces. This angered the Tarok Youths; they reported the incident to the Police and Police took the boy's body after two days. the body had even started decomposing in the farm".

On the allegation that the paramount ruler has been on the throne illegally, he said this is not true because the government did not send any letter to the Nden Lot Ponzi Kadarko Chieftdom asking him to resign or withdraw from his post.

However, he said, the chief has a letter and a certificate of appointment

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given to him after he was elected by the king makers and appointed by the Plateau State Government as the paramount leader of Kadarko Chiefdom.

Special Adviser to the Plateau state Government on Media and Public Affairs Mr Dan Manjang reiterated the government's commitment to ensure peace and stability in the area.

He said "Government is aware that only one person was killed and all the accused persons, including the traditional rulers, are being investigated and they are giving useful information to the Police on the causes of the crisis. Whoever is involved in the crisis will be punished by the government."

Plateau State Police Public Relations Officer Bala Kassim said six people were arrested, including the Paramount ruler Ponzi Suku and the main suspect in the murder of the person that died during the land dispute. Six guns were recovered from some of the arrested men, he said. The police PRO said, "Initially we deployed half a unit of mobile Policemen in the area and now we added a unit of mobile policemen and they are giving the command updated reports on the situation in the area every two hours.

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It s not true that some people were killed in the bush. If it happened, we most know because our people are in the bush and we intensified army and Police Joint patrol. Everything is calm. We are even trying to reduce the number of the Mobile Police in the area."

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