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Wednesday, January 20, 2010

## Jos crisis escalates, govt deploys troops

- Jonathan, Security chiefs meet
- Jang imposes 24-hour curfew
- Senate seeks sanction for sponsors
- Police arrest 100 suspects
- Hospitals overstretched, urge help  
*From Madu Onuorah (Abuja), Isa Abdulsalami, John-Abba Ogbodo, Azimazi-Momoh Jimoh (Abuja), Simeon Nwakauda (Makurdi) and Seye Olumide (Lagos)*

**NIGERIA'S** security chiefs yesterday rose to the challenge posed to national stability by the raging Jos, Plateau State crisis with an immediate deployment of troops to the troubled state.

At the emergency security parley summoned by Vice President Goodluck Jonathan, the Federal Government also dispatched a fact-finding team to the state.

The House of Representatives followed suit by mandating a panel to visit the scenes of the clashes and report back to it.

But Christian leaders, who are apparently unimpressed by the poor response of the Federal Government to the renewed violence, have asked the National Assembly to empower state governors to quell sectarian crisis.

As the security top brass were brainstorming in Abuja on ways to end the crisis, rampaging youths in Jos allegedly torched more houses and killed more residents.

The Senate, which expressed anger over the resurgence of the crisis, ordered the security agencies to deal with the perpetrators.

It said the legislature would no longer condone the situation where innocent Nigerians are killed at the least provocation.

Those at the meeting were the Secretary to the Government of the Federation (SGF), Alhaji Yayale Ahmed, National Security Adviser, Maj.-Gen. Sarki Muktar (rtd), Chief of Defence Staff, Air Chief Marshal Paul Dike, Inspector-General of Police, Ogbonna Onovo, Director-General of the State Security Services (SSS), Mr. Afakriya Gadzama and the Minister of Interior, Dr. Shettima Mustafa.

Earlier, Mustafa had ducked a question on details of the meeting, saying: "we have briefed Mr. Vice President. The chairman of the group that came to brief Mr. Vice President is the NSA (National Security Adviser)."

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Muktar told journalists that "as at yesterday (Monday) the situation seemed to have normalised. But for reasons we can't explain yet, but which we are going to find out now, it erupted again. The Vice President has directed that the Inspector-General of Police, the Director of Operations of the SSS and other officers connected with the situation should immediately move to Jos, assess the situation and return.

"There has been very conflicting reports from different media and other sources. And to have a clear picture, we have to send the team. So, any statement I am going to make now will be presumptuous. Let them come back and we will have a fair assessment of the situation that will form the basis of the statement we are going to make. At the moment, the military has moved in concert with the police to normalise the situation," he said.

In a statement yesterday in Abuja, Jonathan said the government is determined to find a permanent solution to the Jos crisis, declaring that "the country cannot afford these constant eruptions."

Through his Senior Special Assistant Ima Niboro, the Vice President said he had directed an urgent meeting of all stakeholders towards achieving lasting peace in the area.

The statement read: "Once again, there has been an eruption in Jos, the Plateau State capital, accompanied by a most regrettable loss of life and property. This is one crisis too many, and the Federal Government finds it most unacceptable, retrogressive, and capable of further sundering the bonds of unity in our country. The country cannot afford these constant eruptions, and while the situation has been brought under control by the security agencies, government is determined to find a permanent solution to the Jos crisis.

"Today (yesterday), the Vice President, Dr. Goodluck Ebele Jonathan, convened a meeting of security chiefs to review the situation and initiate forward processes to reign in the violence.. This is in addition to the initial orders for the urgent containment of the crisis. He has further directed an urgent meeting of all key stakeholders, towards achieving lasting peace in the area.

"Today (yesterday), he also directed the Inspector General of Police and the top hierarchy of the security services, to proceed to Jos immediately to assess the situation and advise on further steps. They are also to put in place comprehensive security strategies to ensure that these constant eruptions do not happen again.

"The Vice President seizes this opportunity to call upon all Nigerians to remain law abiding and shun subversive tendencies such as we have just witnessed in Jos. The Federal Government is determined to maintain law and order at all times since there can be no meaningful development in an atmosphere of disagreement and rancour.

"The Vice President is confident that our nation can move beyond our current challenges, no matter how daunting they may seem, to build an even greater Nigeria."

Senate President David Mark yesterday also charged security operatives to do everything possible to bring the situation in Jos under control.

In a remark after the Senate had approved a request by Senator

Gyang Dantong to bring a motion before it yesterday, Mark said: "I appeal to all security agencies in the country to quell the riot as quickly as possible. They must also ensure that all those behind the crisis are brought to book without fear or favour.

"We cannot continue to tolerate all these type of nonsense. People just wake-up and bring one section of Nigeria to a complete standstill. We must sound a note of warning to those who are perpetrating this crisis that this nation cannot sit down, and allow a few individuals to cause problems all the time," he said

Mark said the recurrent decimal of crisis in Jos had become a source of national embarrassment, saying: "Everything must be done to put an end to this".

Before its yesterday's session, the Lower House Speaker, Dimeji Bankole addressed members on the Jos crisis. "In the last three days, there have been skirmishes in Jos but the Inspector-General of Police told me last night that the situation had been brought under control.

"However, this morning, the IG told me that the problem has returned and he was going to Jos to personally see things for himself. We, therefore, would like the committee on Jos crisis led by the Deputy Speaker to visit Jos and report back to us," he said.

The death toll from the mayhem is believed to have hit 120.

This prompted Governor Jonah Jang to impose a dusk-to-dawn curfew in Jos/Bukuru metropolis, the area where the fighting is fierce.

Although security was beefed up, there are sporadic shootings in the metropolis. At the Plateau State Specialist Hospital, before the curfew was declared, hospital officials told The Guardian that 20 bodies had been brought to the facility.

At the Jos University Teaching Hospital, it was learnt that 80 bodies were in the morgue while several people were receiving treatment from matchet and cutlass wounds.

In a broadcast yesterday, the Commissioner for Information and Communications, Mr. Gregory Yenlong, said that a 24-hour curfew had been imposed on Jos/Bukuru metropolis.

He said: "The state government, in consultation with the state security council after reviewing the prevailing situation in Jos metropolis has directed the immediate imposition of a 24-hour curfew in Jos and Bukuru.

Meanwhile, the police have arrested 100 miscreants in connection with the crisis.

Those arrested are from Dutse Uku, Congo Russia and Angwam Nshanu. They were found with dangerous weapons including Ak-47, locally made pistols, daggers, axes, cutlasses, among others.

"All residents are therefore advised to adhere strictly to this directive. Residents are further advised not to take the law into their hands, but to remain calm as efforts are being made to bring the situation under control.

"All workers are advised to vacate all offices and return home immediately. Only those on essential services, most especially

medical officers, media personnel and security officers are exempted from this directive please."

On Monday, Jang said no stone would be left unturned to ensure that the perpetrators of the unrest in Nasarawa Gwom face the wrath of the law.

He stated this after a close door meeting with two former civilian governors of the state, Chief Solomon Lar and Chief Joshua Dariye.

Commenting on the meeting with the past leaders, Jang said they agreed to work together to maintain peace on the Plateau. He said all of them should work together to ensure permanent peace in the state.

According to him: "I am assuring the people of Plateau State that no stone will be left unturned to fish out the culprits and bring them to book."

The governor advised youths in the state to be law-abiding and to co-operate with the security agents, saying that government would ensure that there was no repeat of such mayhem. He consoled all those affected by the unrest.

The Chief Medical Director of Plateau Specialist Hospital, Pam Dantong, said about nine bodies were brought to the hospital. He said those wounded and killed had machete cuts.

Dantong said the hospital was facing challenges as all its drugs had been exhausted, adding that the wounded had been treated with consumables both the theatre and the out-patient units.

The Speaker of the House of Assembly, Istisanus Mwansat, has directed members to reconvene from their recess to discuss the violence in the state.

Similarly, the Inter-Government Council for Peace and Harmony, has condemned the civil unrest. The council Co-Chairman and the Catholic Archbishop of Jos, Rev. Ignatius Kigama, stated this shortly after the body's meeting.

The council, which convened an emergency meeting, expressed dismay over the frequent resort to violence as a mean of resolving communal and religious disputes. It appealed to those using GSM handsets to peddle rumours and cause panic, to refrain from the act.

President of the Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria (PFN), Pastor Ayo Oritsejafor, has appealed to the members of the National Assembly to empower state governors to prosecute perpetrators of religious crisis in their states.

His plea was prompted by the fresh outbreak of violence in Jos, where the Plateau State government has imposed a dusk-to-dawn curfew.

In a statement made available to The Guardian yesterday, the cleric offered solutions to the perennial religious skirmishes in some parts of the country.

He reiterated his call on Christians to always defend themselves whenever they were attacked.

Oritsejafor also urged the media to avoid mix-up of issues when reporting such crises with the excuse that it was being done in public interest.

"What interest is the media serving or protecting when innocent Christians are being mauled down persistently in the northern parts of the country at any slightest opportunity?

"I think the media owe this nation the responsibility to preserve the country's unity by saying the truth at all times. It is becoming a resurgent too many".

He also suggested a political solution that will involve the 17 southern states governors, whose citizens are at the receiving end of such mayhem to engage their 19 northern counterparts in a dialogue to protect them.

"The National Assembly should also enact laws that will empower state governors to prosecute master-minders of ethno-religious crises in any part of the nation."

The clerics also charged the Federal Government to take urgent steps to implement similar recommendations on the matter to save the nation from being plunged into a major religious war.

"I want our political leaders to realize that no nation has ever survived a religious war. It is much more devastating than an ethnic war.

The dimension Jos crisis is taking is sending a red signal to the nation and something urgent must be done to address it. I, therefore, plead with the relevant authorities to move fast and stop the growing tide of religious intolerance in the country."

"The Jos situation cannot continue as it is and we pretend that we belong to one nation where persons cannot express their inalienable fundamental human rights of worship openly in some parts of the country.

"Why are our leaders protesting that the United States (US) is unfair to us in placing Nigeria on the terrorist watch list because of the activity of one young Nigerian, if we cannot guarantee the safety of innocent citizens because of religious differences? Going by the recent crisis, have we not inadvertently demonstrated to the international community that we harbour terrorists in the nation?

"Or could it be interpreted that the National Assembly has failed in its oversight functions because of the many unresolved religious issues that needed the attention of our law makers," he queried.

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