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Tuesday, January 26, 2010

We know culprits of Jos crisis, say police

- Put death toll at 326
- Military restates faith in democracy
- Solomon Lar, Gowon, sue for peace
From Madu Onuorah, Abuja and Isa Abdulsalami, Jos

THE Plateau State Police Command yesterday admitted that it knows the identity of the culprits in the latest Jos crisis, pledging that they will all be brought to book. It added that so far, there are 326 deaths in the crisis, while 313 arrests were made out of which 139 were transferred to the Force Headquarters in Abuja because of congestion in Jos.

The Chief of Defence Staff, Air Chief Marshal Paul Dike, has meanwhile stressed that democracy remains the only acceptable form of government in the country. He therefore warned members of the Armed Forces to "steer clear of politics."

Briefing journalists yesterday on behalf of the Police, the Police Public Relations Officer (PPRO) of the Command, Assistant Superintendent Mohammed Lerama, said the crisis has no religious connotation, "rather it was hijacked in the name of religion by demons with human faces."

"The mindless killing was carried out in places like Kuru Jenta, Timtim and other places. The suspects are known and they are on the run and if they fail to give themselves up, they will be declared wanted. While we assure the people that all the culprits will be arraigned in court here in Jos, we equally call on the public to cooperate with the security agencies and to maintain the peace."

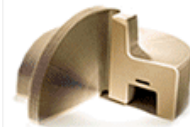
According to him, the Acting Commissioner of Police, Ikechukwu Aduba, who is on special duty, is to sustain a lasting peace in the state, adding that the military are fully in charge but operationally, it is a joint action to curb any act of lawlessness.

"Police are to work hand in hand with the military. And so, the relation is very cordial. The crisis is condemnable and there is a colossal loss of both in human and property. There was a mindless killing perpetrated by demon incarnates", Lerama added,

Meanwhile, government has said that it has come to its notice that some people are still printing divisive messages in some areas affected by the crisis. It warns all such individuals or group of persons to desist from such acts or face the full wrath of the law.

A statement yesterday by the Director of Press and Public

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Affairs, Mr. James Mannok, stressed that government would not allow anyone to create disharmony in the state as all citizens must live together and respect one another.

In another development, the state Governor Jonah Jang has called for forgiveness among the people of the state. He spoke yesterday when a group of sympathisers visited him at Government House, Rayfield, Jos, before the stakeholders meeting.

Jang told them that he believed in the rising of a greater Plateau, adding that he wants people to help one another by sharing their food and clothing and opening their homes to the displaced persons. He said that the state government had been doing all within its power and resources to provide reliefs to the injured and the displaced.

The governor appealed to the people of the state to remain calm always and avoid spreading rumours through their mobile phones as doing so can easily mislead the security personnel who are working hard to maintain the peace. He said the crisis is a challenge to the people of the state to learn some lessons about themselves and pray that this would be the last crisis in the state.

Meanwhile, the Plateau State chapter of the People's Democratic Party (PDP) has joined its national leaders in condemning the violence.

The statement issued by the party in Jos said the crisis has further shown that certain elements are out to ensure that Jos and Plateau State did not enjoy the peace and harmony they deserved.

The party wondered why some persons would take delight in taking the lives of fellow human beings and inflict pains on them under whatever guise. It added that the crisis has brought to the fore the earlier position that the Jos crisis of November 2008 was not political but had ethnic and religious under-tones.

The statement, signed by the state secretary of the party, Mr. Daniel Dakim, commended the federal and state governments and the security agencies for, according to it, their prompt action in bringing the situation under control.

It also urged governments at all levels to ensure that perpetrators of such dastardly acts and their sponsors are brought to book.

Dakim implored government, philanthropists and the international community to provide succour in whatever form to the victims.

On Saturday, the Inspector-General of Police, Ogbonna Onovo, deployed the Plateau State Commissioner of Police, Gregory Anyanting, to the Force Headquarters in Abuja and ordered the Commissioner of Police in charge of Police Mobile Force, Jos, Ikechukwu Aduba, on special duty as the Acting Commissioner of Police in the state.

A statement by the Police spokesman, said the joint patrol by the Armed Forces and the Police is still in force. The statement added that any information that could lead to the arrest of the fleeing murderers should be sent to the joint operation room at the Police Headquarters while people could go about their lawful business and maintain the peace with the assurance of their

security and safety.

The statement advised parents to warn their wards to exercise restraint, as anybody arrested would be dealt with decisively.

Chief of Defence Staff, Air Chief Dike, yesterday declared that "regardless of the imperfections of our political experiments, democracy remains the only acceptable form of governance."

According to him, the Nigerian military would not in any way meddle in the political affairs of the country.

"Politics is better played by politicians," he declared warning all personnel of the military to "steer clear of politics."

He spoke at the commissioning of the Nigerian Army Peacekeeping Forward Operations Base along the Bill Clinton Drive, Abuja.

It is the duty of all military personnel to defend the nation's democracy at all costs, he said.

Also speaking at the occasion, Chief of Army Staff, Lt. Gen. Abdulrahman Dambazau said the Nigerian Army is "absolutely committed to the survival of our nascent democracy."

Dambazau noted that with "the subsisting democratic environment" giving "us a lot of advantages in our pursuit of professionalism, the Nigerian Army affirms its commitment to its constitutional responsibilities and will continue to contribute meaningfully to the enthronement of democracy in Nigeria.

The Nigerian Army urges all stakeholders in our national affairs to eschew violence and promote peace and tranquillity in Nigeria."

The Army Chief also remarked that those accusing the Army of taking sides in the latest Jos crisis are missing the issues as all Army personnel, by their training, "have placed us above primordial sentiments."

In the Jos crisis, he said, "no (Nigerian Army) soldier fired a shot. For this operation, there was no order for any soldier to fire. So, soldiers have not fired a shot."

He noted that with "the recent comments and innuendos about our Armed Forces by certain segments of our society pertaining to developments in our political scene, I am compelled to remind everyone of the constitutional role of the Armed Forces which is primarily anchored on the protection of Nigeria's territorial integrity. Meddling in political issues does not complement our constitutional role in any way, shape or form. I therefore warn all members of the Armed Forces to steer clear of politics. Ours is a military that is mindful of its past, conscious of its present and hopeful of its future.

"The Nigerian Armed Forces will therefore not depart from its chosen path of honour. Consequently, I urge all of you to remain focussed and committed to the service of our fatherland. We must always remind ourselves that politics is better played by politicians. Also, I must not fail to stress that regardless of the imperfections of our political experiments, democracy remains the only acceptable form of governance. And as members of the Nigerian Armed Forces, we must defend it at all cost."

Dike said it is imperative for all personnel of the military to "justify the trust of the nation's leadership by exhibiting unflinching

loyalty."

Dambazau dismissed the accusations of genocide against the Nigerian Army during the crisis in Jos, saying that "we are too clean to do that."

He added that accusations that the General Officer Commanding (GOC) 3 Division, Maj.- Gen. Saleh Maina, a Muslim does not mean he would move against Christians as "the Chief of Staff is Yoruba. He is responsible for organising operations. The Garrison Commander is a Yoruba and Christian. And he supervises, deploys the troops. Anyone bringing religion into this is trying to bring tension."

In a related development, Chief Solomon Lar has implored the state government to place all traditional rulers and local government chairmen on alert and impress it on them they would be held responsible for any act of lawlessness in their domain.

Lar, who gave the advice yesterday at the stakeholders meeting convened by the Plateau State Government said the crisis in the state was being fanned from outside, noting that the latest crisis goes beyond misunderstanding between Christians and Muslims.

He urged the Federal Government and the National Assembly to work towards ensuring that anything that has to do with religion is expunged from the Nigeria Constitution.

Former Head of State, Gen. Yakubu Gowon, also speaking on the occasion, said: "It is the responsibility of all to arrest the situation, it is not the responsibility of a government alone, if we want peace all hands must be on deck, and enough is enough. Everybody should determine in his heart that it will never happen again."

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