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18 die in dawn invasion of Plateau communities

WEDNESDAY, 12 JANUARY 2011 00:00 FROM ISA ABDULSALAMI, JOS
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COMBATANTS in the raging crisis in Plateau State yesterday returned to the trenches as gunmen who raided two rural communities killed 18 of the residents. But unofficial reports put the death toll at 23 with most of the victims identified as women and children.

The attack on Wareng village in Riyom Local Council of the state in the wee hours of the day, was reportedly carried out by some persons identified by the locals as "strangers," who were allegedly assisted by Fulani herdsmen and soldiers deployed in the area.

They victims were allegedly machetted to death while the survivors with serious injuries were rushed to some hospitals in the state capital.

Some wailing residents accused soldiers in the area of taking part in the attacks and called on the Federal Government to replace them with mobile policemen.

The state Commissioner of Police, Mr. Abdulrahman Akano, who confirmed the death toll yesterday, said: "For now, I can authoritatively confirm that 13 people have been killed in the night attack in Wareng village by unknown assailants."

Later, Akano said the death toll had risen to 18 as five more bodies were found in Barkin Ladi Local Council.

The state government, which promptly called an emergency security meeting, condemned the wanton destruction of life and property in Jos/Bukuru metropolis and its environs. In a statement issued after the Security Council meeting, which was signed by the Permanent Secretary (Cabinet and Special Services), Istifanus Gyang, the Jonah Jang administration said it viewed "with grave concern the involvement of mostly under-aged youths in perpetuating the criminal acts during the disturbances."

The council also expressed deep concern on the attack on travellers on federal and state highways, directing the Special Task Force (STF) and the police to properly secure all highways and other roads in the state for free and unhindered passage by all users.

A member representing Riyom constituency in the state House of Assembly, Emmanuel Danboyi Jugul, said it was the soldiers that carried out this heinous act.

Jugul said: "My people are saying they don't need soldiers again. All the victims were machetted to death in a shameful operation led by soldiers who are deployed to protect us.

"Some strange faces came on Monday during the day to survey the area where they would launch the attack in the night. Fulani people were seen going with these strangers. Our appeal is that both the federal and state governments should withdraw the soldiers. We don't need them again. They are doing more harm than good.

"We want mobile policemen to replace the soldiers. If we are going to die, let us die," he said.

A woman, who was shot by the assailants, said she identified a Fulani man living in the community for

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long among the people that came on Monday to survey the community ahead of the attack.

"All these soldiers are living well because the Fulani people give them a lot of money. Honestly, we are disenchanted with these soldiers, they are not helping matters at all. The best thing is to let them go and mobile policemen brought in so that we can have peace."

The meeting, which reviewed the current security challenges in Plateau, especially the Jos/Bukuru disturbances, said "misrepresentation of facts, exaggeration mostly peddled through mobile phones and some media houses were some of the factors responsible for the resurgence of violence in the state." The council warned the residents to desist from acts that could ignite violence, resolving that those arrested for perpetrating violence are prosecuted to deter future occurrence and check the prevailing culture of impunity.

Also yesterday, the Berom Educational and Cultural Organisation (BECO) said it was deeply touched by the unending violence unleashed on innocent Nigerians resident in Jos and its environs by extremist/terrorist groups.

In a statement by its University of Jos (UNIJOS) chapter's Chairman, Dr. Joshua Pam Chollom, the group said it is worried about the internationalisation of the Jos conflict, which has manifested in terrorist financing and training of domestic terrorist groups to kill their perceived enemies by Al-Qaeda in the Maghreb.

"We are equally worried by the cycle of support given to domestic dissident Islamic bodies in Jos by some Muslim groups in some West African countries notably Chad, Niger, Northern Sudan as well some northern states in Nigeria.

"They come in the form of mercenaries. This can be confirmed by the nationality of those arrested in the various Jos conflicts since 2001. Equally worrisome is the national domestic response capacity to this direct foreign attack on the nation.

"The response at best has been embarrassingly poor. After Al-Qaeda's pronouncement of its support to dissident domestic groups in 2009, there was neither a concerted attempt to reveal to Nigerians, government's response strategy nor where citizens are publicly reassured of their safety. Rather, what the government did was to fight hard for the de-listing of the country from the international terrorism map.

"Two months after the conditional delisting, a domestic terrorist group (the Boko Haram) with firm foreign support struck and caused havoc in North Eastern Nigeria and has remained a menace to national security (as demonstrated by the recent attacks in Bauchi and bombing of Jos) without any determined, comprehensive and pragmatic response by the government.

"This is a sign of government's absolute weakness in confronting this blatant violation of national sovereignty," he said.

Chollom added that the recurring attacks on indigenous communities in Jos North, Jos South and Bassa Local councils were clear signs that some members of the STF have compromised their neutrality by conniving with the Fulani attackers.

"In all, the attacks whether they are mass killing at Dogon Nahawa or the stealing of cattle in several villages since January 2010, the survivors of these attacks have reported the involvement of some members of the Joint Task Force. It is becoming clear that the Fulani attackers heavily finance these murders and stealing."

The group urged the Council of Ulama to call their adherents to order and allow persons living in Jos and environs to take their personal security in their hands by empowering them to organise neighbourhood watch teams.

At a press conference in Jos yesterday, the Igbo Community Association (ICA) in Plateau State chapter demanded the unconditional release of the Igbo youths who were arrested on Saturday by the soldiers while protecting their wares with no arms.

The group's National President, Chief Richard Wayas, said that the Igbo have lost confidence in the task force.

Wayas said: "We have been living in peace with our host communities and other ethnic nationalities in the state. It could be recalled that the state started witnessing crisis from 2001 till date. While some people say the crisis is political, others say it is religious. On Saturday, January, 2011, when the Hausa youths went on rampage following the killing of their kinsmen in Mangu Local Council, they attacked us and as a result, there are 40 bodies now in the mortuaries while others are still lying critically wounded and are being treated in various hospitals.

"Hausa/Fulani youths on that day burned down our bus on Bauchi Road, carrying only Igbo. What has killing our people or burning our bus got to do with the Mangu incident? We call on both the federal and state government to live up to their responsibility. It is a pity that men of the STF were around when innocent people were killed. We expect the STF commander to be neutral. We have lost total

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confidence in the commander of the STF. My appeal to the Igbo is that they should remain calm while we await for the outcome of our petition,” he said.

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