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ACF cautions against associating killings with religious, ethnic groups

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• Death toll in Borno blasts hits 51

THE Arewa Consultative Forum (ACF) has cautioned Nigerians against attributing the communal clashes in some parts of the country to religion and ethnicity, saying doing so would be dangerous for the nation.

Meanwhile, authorities of the University of Maiduguri Teaching Hospital (UMTH) and the Specialists Hospital, Maiduguri in Borno State, have said the death toll in Tuesday's multiple suicide car bombings at a military post and Molai firewood market has increased from 21 to 51, after collating bodies of people brought into the mortuaries for identification.

The northern socio-cultural group reacted to the spate of recent killings and destruction of property in some northern communities following attacks by gunmen, pointing out that "reports in the last one month have shown that 17 states of the northern region have witnessed persistent attacks by gunmen, insurgents and suspected herdsmen on innocent people leading to huge loss of lives and property, as well as displacement of residents".

In a statement issued in Kaduna and signed by the ACF Publicity Secretary, Alhaji Mohammad Ibrahim, he explained that "the spate of killings in the northern states of Nigeria by gunmen and insurgents have continued to pose serious challenges to the nation's security agencies", stressing that "the daily attack on villages and communities by unknown gunmen and insurgents in most states of the North is barbaric, worrisome and unacceptable".

Worried by the damage the various attacks have inflicted on the region, the ACF stated: "Report from the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) shows that over 3 million people were displaced, 1500 people killed and property worth billions of naira destroyed as a result of insurgency attacks in Borno, Yobe and Adamawa states within a period of three months (January - March 2014)".

Ibrahim explained that "the recent ethnic/communal clashes in Benue, Plateau, Nasarawa and

Kaduna states had left scores of death, destruction of property and put the people in a state of despair and hopelessness. The most disturbing aspect is associating such attacks with religion and ethnicity.

“The generalisation based on ethnicity and religion is very dangerous, as it enables criminals to shield under group. Furthermore, the majority of members of such accused ethnic or religious groups may be pushed to reconsider their opposition to violence, since generalisation does not spare them”.

Ibrahim, however, said: “ACF has noted the recent heavy deployment of troops and other security agencies in the north-east zone, particularly Sambisa forest and the states of Benue, Kaduna, Plateau and Nasarawa, to neutralise the enclaves of insurgents and criminal gangs.

“According to the Military Command, as reported, the renewed synergy and cordial relationship among the Armed Forces, coupled with their high morale have made them to record some successes in neutralising the insurgency. ACF commends the effort, the renewed vigour and resilience of the security agencies in tackling the menace of the insurgents and gunmen and equally calls on them to sustain the onslaught”.

According to ACF, “the intelligence communities and security agencies should reconsider and strengthen their strategy and approach on this national malaise. The communities must also get involved in intelligence gathering and alert the security”.

The recovered bodies, according to the mortuary attendant of the Specialist Hospital, are the ones picked up by members of the Civilian JTF and policemen at three separate scenes of blasts, and around the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) mega station.

The attendant said contrary to the death toll of 21 people declared by the Director of Defence Information, Maj.-Gen. Chris Olukolade, yesterday in Abuja, the number of confirmed bodies at the two mortuaries has increased to 51.

At the UMTH morgue, the attendant also told The Guardian that 15 bodies were brought to the morgue, along with 19 injured persons, including security personnel of the hospital’s Emergency and Accident Unit (EAUT) for treatment for fire burns and fractures.

The Guardian also learnt that the Specialists Hospital received 31 bodies on Tuesday evening, while the UMTH morgue had 20 bodies for identifications before burial.

Confirming the total number of injured persons, the Borno State Police Public Relations Officer (PPRO), Gideon Jibrin, said besides the rise in death toll, the number of people injured in the multiple blasts had also increased from 17 to 25 by 9 pm by Tuesday.