

Controversy trails death toll in Taraba crisis

From Charles Akpeji, Jalingo

NO fewer than 50 persons may have died and over 70 hospitalised with injuries from the lingering crisis in Wukari Local Council of Taraba State, contrary to the state Police Command's claim of only seven.

A source told *The Guardian* yesterday that the victims included the elder brother of Daniel Ishaya Gani, the chairman of House of Assembly Committee on Information, Culture and Tourism, and some security personnel.

Strike paralyses activities at LAUTECH teaching hospital

Speaking on the crisis, the Special Assistant to the Acting Governor on Media and Publicity, Aron Atmas, said the Acting Governor, Garba Umar, has imposed a 24-hour curfew in Wukari following the violence that has lingered since Tuesday.

According to an eyewitness, the crisis started on Tuesday in Nwokyo village and spilled over to the council headquarters as a result of the mass killing by Fulani herdsmen in the village. It has now spread to Bali Local Council

Area, forcing the Tiv community there to flee.

The source disclosed that several worship centres, including the Deeper Life Bible Church, Christian Reform Church of Nigeria (CRCN), as well as several other houses and business centres were razed by the attackers.

Also, a medical personnel at the Wukari General Hospital, said "shooting is still on and the death toll would definitely continue to increase. Some of the injured persons have also given up the ghost

here (hospital) because we lack some facilities. Though I cannot give you the exact figure of persons killed, I can confirm that it is far more than what the police gave you."

Head of the Nigerian Red Cross in the state, Umar T. Waziri, confirmed the lingering crisis in Wukari but added that it was impossible to ascertain the casualty figures because of the raging gunfire in the area.

He said: "Our men are on ground but for now, no in-

formation on ground because as we are talking, gunfire is still raging there. So, it is not possible for us to get the accurate number of casualties."

The Police Public Relations Officer, ASP Joseph Kwaji, had disclosed that only seven persons were killed and that normalcy was fast returning to the area, a comment the Red Cross frowned at.

However, Atmas said the state government, in collaboration with security operatives, was working round the

clock to restore peace to the area. He added that the government has been supporting the security personnel to enable them carry out their assigned responsibilities effectively.

Nevertheless, the House of Assembly member, who lost his elder brother to the crisis, has condemned the acting governor for not deeming it fit to visit any of the crisis areas. He urged the Federal Government to urgently deploy military personnel to the area to quell the crisis.

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