

I'm ready to face trial anywhere, says Modu Sheriff

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AS the Islamist terrorist group, *Boko Haram*, continued its fierce campaign for illegal territorial expansion in Nigeria, former Governor of Borno State and the sect's alleged mastermind and sponsor, Ali Modu Sheriff, has declared readiness to face any panel in any part of the world seeking to unravel the group's sponsors.

Addressing a news conference in Abuja yesterday, Sheriff said he has instructed his lawyers "to sue the faceless Australian negotiator, Stephen Davis," just as he denied allegations that he was a sponsor, describing them as "politically motivated."

"I must say that I have been utterly embarrassed by some of the negative comments, insinuations and unfounded accusations which were clearly misdirected, narrow and mischievous," he said.

"Ordinarily, I would have continued with my silence, but the smear campaign seems to be assuming a life of its own with the recent purported interview granted by a supposed Australian, Stephen Davis, whose identity remains suspect."

Nevertheless, *Boko Haram* invaded Gulani town in Yobe State on Tuesday night, taking over the council secretariat and lodge. Gulani, one of the strongest enclaves of the insurgents in Yobe South Senatorial District, is a border town with Buni Yadi, the already captured council headquarters, 164 kilometres west of

• Boko Haram captures more towns in Borno, Yobe

• Nigeria seeks international collaboration against terrorism

Damaturu, the state capital. A Gulani resident, Bukar Isa, disclosed on telephone yesterday that no one was killed in the invasion, but that the insurgents said they came "not to kill but to preach and do the work of Allah according to the Quran."

The same night, the gunmen, in their trademark convoy of Toyota Hilux vehicles and motorcycles, attacked the border town of Banki in Borno State and killed an unconfirmed number of residents.

According to a resident, Ibrahim Musa, in a telephone interview from a Cameroonian border village yesterday, the Nigerian Customs Service (NCS), Nigerian Immigration Service (NIS), military and police posts at Banki border areas have been deserted by security personnel after the attack.

He added that gunmen have taken over the town and hoisted their flags at the market square and the central mosque near the police outpost, while asking the youth not to fear but to join them to fight soldiers from both countries.

Military sources also told *The Guardian* yesterday that the insurgents were on a "continuous rampage" attacking border towns and villages.

Meanwhile, there have been conflicting claims over the real status of Bama town in Borno State, where the Nigerian military countered the insurgents last week. The representative of Borno Central District in the Senate, Ahmed Zannah, yesterday challenged both the state government and the military authority to take the media to

the town to confirm its current status.

This came as *Reuters* cited the Borno State Government and local vigilante groups as claiming yesterday that Bama remained under government control after a *Boko Haram* assault.

Borno Deputy Governor, Zanna Mustapha, who is also an opposition politician, said in a statement: "The attack on Bama town was very unfortunate, but I want to reassure our people that government is on top of the situation. Our security forces are engaging the insurgents in a fierce battle."

Pro-government vigilantes also said the town remained in the hands of Nigerian forces. Their spokesman, Jibrin Gunda, told newsmen: "Our gallant soldiers successfully repelled the insurgents who attacked Bama, (which) has never been overrun or overtaken by the insurgents even for a minute."

And for a comprehensive approach to fighting terrorism, the Federal Government yesterday in Abuja called for more effective global action and implementation of all existing international protocols against terrorism and violent extremism.

Minister of Foreign Affairs, Ambassador Aminu Wali, who made the call while declaring open the meeting on security, affirmed that terrorism would be defeated sooner than later. He said that since terrorism has become global in scope, greater regional and international collaboration was needed to combat it.

"We need to intensify the sharing of intelligence and information on the operations of terrorists," he said. "We also need to track both local and external sources of funds, logistics, arms and ammunition to the terrorists with a view to cutting them off so as to deny them the oxygen that nourishes insurgency."

"As we seek to break any operational link between *Boko Haram*, *Al Qaeda*, *El Shabaab*, and other terrorist networks in the Sahel, we must not allow *Boko Haram* to establish fresh links with the self-styled Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS)."

In attendance were ministers from Cameroun, Canada, China, France, United Kingdom and the United States, and representatives from Benin Republic, Chad, Niger, the United Nations, and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS).

Moreover, a former Chief Whip of the Senate, Roland Owie, yesterday called on President Goodluck Jonathan to order full invasion of Sambisa Forest, as the delay in invading the den of the dreaded sect gives members more time to regroup.

He also called on the National Assembly to approve a full-scale state of emergency in Borno, warning that the war on terror in the country may be prolonged if the activities of the sect were not tackled seriously and urgently.

Similarly, diaspora natives of Dzev in Shangevya district of Kwande local council of Benue State have called on the In-

spector-General of Police (IGP), Mr. Suleiman Abba, to provide security for Dzev people and stop further destruction of lives and property in the area by their Mbakyaa kindred and neighbours.

They also called on Governor Gabriel Suswam to urgently intervene in the communal clash that has already claimed lives and rendered thousands of people homeless.

In a statement by its members, the people called on the Federal Government to direct the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) to come to the rescue of people displaced by the crisis, many of whom now take refuge under trees and live in abject hunger.

For the President and Chairman of Council, Institute of Chartered Secretaries and Administrators of Nigeria (IC-SAN), Dr Suleyman Ndanusa, the security challenges in the country have attendant negative effects on governance.

Ndanusa told newsmen in Abuja yesterday that Nigeria cannot continue to sweep matters of security under the carpet and live pretentiously as if nothing is going on. According to him, "it is important that policy makers take critical look at issues and their effects on the economy and populace."

"The security situation in the country has affected every segment of the nation's economy. It goes without saying that the present situation has grave governance implications. When you have youth unemployment and poverty, you create readymade or potential battalion of people that can be used by all kinds of extremists on sentiments."

It was also learnt that both

Gulani and Buni Yadi had been severally attacked by the same group. Sources in the town said the militants passed the night in Gulani town and called the early morning prayers at the Central Mosque, where they preached to some residents that remained behind.

"When they realized that people were panicking, they went to the ward head's house and registered their arrival, telling him that their coming was just to preach and not to harm anyone," Isa said.

Isa noted that there were no security operatives to challenge the Islamists, who were still occupying the lodge, adding that though not much of their activities have been reported in the farming and herding community, the area has remained under their total control before its capture.

Sheriff added: "Davis claimed to be working for the Federal Government but could not even avail the same government which hired him the report of his findings, or speak to the Nigerian media, but rather sneaked out to purportedly speak to a third-rate television."

"The posers here are: why was the face of the said Davis not shown in all three interviews he granted? What particular interest has the said Davis in the politics of Nigeria that he rose in defence of prominent APC (All Progressives Congress) leaders? Is the Australian a negotiator, an investigator, an anti-graft agent, a reporter, judge or a mere gadfly?"

Condemning the involvement of the APC leaders in the media war against him, Sheriff said his defection from the APC seemed to have galvanised his detractors, who have converted the matter to a political weapon.