

News

Fresh Trouble Flares In Plateau State

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THERE has been palpable tension in Bassa local council of Plateau State following the killing of 11 persons in Ta'agbe community of Miango chiefdom by gunmen in the early hours of yesterday. The state Police Command also confirmed that 30 houses were burnt during the attack. In a statement, the state Police Public Relations Officer (PPRO), ASP Uba Ogba, said: "On 26/11/2021 at about 0130hrs, the Command received a report of an attack by yet to be identified gunmen at Ta'agbe Village of Bassa LGA of the State. "Upon receipt of the report, the Commissioner of Police, Plateau State Command, Bartholomew Onyeka, immediately drafted a tactical team of the Command to the scene to avert further attack. "Unfortunately, 10 persons were killed and about 30 houses set ablaze by the attackers.

"The Commissioner of Police further led other Senior Officers of the Command to the scene for an on-the-spot assessment and to console with the victims of the attack.

"The CP has directed that discreet investigation be carried out and assured the community of his readiness to fish out the perpetrators of this barbaric act."

In a swift reaction, Governor Simon Lalong condemned the attack, describing it as the handiwork of criminals who are bent on "instilling fear, pain and sorrow" on fellow residents.

A statement by his spokesman, Makut Macham, quoted Lalong as further saying the state gov-

ernment would do everything within its powers to bring the attackers to justice.

"This is another sad incident, which is clearly the handiwork of criminals who are bent on instilling fear, pain and sorrow among the people.

"This is aimed at destabilising the state and making fortune from their criminality as well as rupturing the substantial peace attained. The persistent attacks in this area remain condemnable and unacceptable to government.

"As such, no resources and efforts will be spared in painstakingly following up on the trail of those who derive joy in attacking and killing innocent citizens and destroying their homes and means of livelihoods."

Lalong also directed the State Emergency Management Agency (SEMA) and the Plateau Peace Building Agency (PPBA) to provide relief items to victims of the attack.

It could be recalled that on Saturday, July 31 and Sunday, August 1, this year, attacks on Miango chiefdom by gunmen saw about 40 people dead, all Irigwe indigenes.

The unfortunate incident, which was condemned by both Christians and Muslim Ummah, later snowballed into another bloody mayhem at Rukuba Road in Jos North local council of the state on Saturday, August 14. On that fateful day, the Miango people (the Irigwes) had evacuated the bodies of the dead from the mortuary of Plateau Specialist Hospital for mass burial in their village.

As the mourners moved slowly, some travellers, moving in five buses, ran into them. Reports had it that the mourners stopped the buses and were told by the

travellers who are Muslims that they were coming from their annual Zikr programme, which was held in Bauchi State, and going to Ikare in Ondo State. They explained that they were taking Rukuba Road as a shortcut to avoid the traffic jam inside the city. Notwithstanding their explanation, the youths allegedly descended on them and killed 23 of them instantly with about 40 of them said to have been missing. They also allegedly set fire on some of the buses.

The crisis escalated further, forcing the state government to impose a 24-hour curfew on Jos North local council. The government had also banned the operations of tricycles in the area. As a result of the tension caused by the crises, many families and also state governments evacuate their relatives/indigenes from the troubled areas. The state governor, Simon Lalong, had lifted the curfew on September 8 after normalcy was restored.

Yesterday's killings and destructions in Miango came barely two months and three weeks after the curfew was lifted.

Reacting to the development in a statement, the Secretary General of Irigwe Development Association (IDA), Danjuma Auta, accused security agencies of negligence, noting that it was an indication that the peace accord earlier signed by the conflicting parties had broken down.

His words: "We have to write this statement stating our pain concerning the renewed orchestrated attacks on our people for no any reason having enjoyed some relative peace that lasted for some weeks now.

"Just last week, we read on social media the

threat sent in by Fulani herders to the military stationed at Ancha, asking them to allow for free grazing in all communities in Irigwe land or be made to face the worst.

"Although the military dismissed such threat, the marauders made right their claims as they attacked Ancha village on Tuesday, November 23, 2021, and killed two people.

"Again, this same Fulani herders attacked the village of Ta'agbe and as at now we have already established the death of 11 people while the search for other victims is ongoing.

"We are worried because times without number we have met at different fora with the Fulani community that we know and have promised to embrace peace but with the renewed attacks on our innocent citizens, we wonder if the peace accord entered into is anything to hold to.

"The Irigwe nation has embraced peace and is also ready to continue to pursue the parts of peace with everyone. However, we will not close our eyes to the deceit that we are witnessing today.

"If those who are saddled with the constitutional responsibility of protecting us feel overwhelmed and can no longer guarantee our safety anymore, they should come out publicly and tell Nigerians."

Auta added: "Our people are beginning to lose confidence in any security outfit since even their presence could not stop, arrest or neutralise the attackers. This speaks volumes of how endangered our people have become.

"Nigerians should know that nobody has the monopoly of violence and since these attacks have

been taking place, no single Fulani hamlet has been attacked by an Irigwe man.

"They burned our several communities, set their herds on yet to be cultivated farms and killed our people yet we have not said anything.

"We are, therefore, pleading with the President of our dear nation to come to our rescue before it is too late. The security operatives must be made to quickly investigate Fulani settlements fingered to be hosting and training these attackers, which we know very well that they are known."

Commenting on the development, the National Coordinator, West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP), Bridget Osakwe, said the disruption of peace in the state of late was caused by what she described as conflict interruption.

She said: "There were reasons they had those interruptions in the past and with government interventions, Civil Society actions and their reports, the first thing is that the report of the previous enquires should be visited and recommendations should be implemented.

"Secondly, it should be inclusive in the processes. Mapping out the role of each stakeholder, including the role of women, must be emphasised and the role of youths should be flagged out. Before now, the communities had their structures of resolving issues and I think that those structures can be activated in resolving these conflicts. Also, the issue of politics should be examined and civic education for the populace is very important."

Osakwe observed that retaliation was responsible for the conflict because there

was no reconciliation. "They interrupted the conflict but there was no reconciliation. If you stop a conflict, it does not mean that you have reconciled. And if you do not reconcile and build peace, along the line, there will be a cycle of the conflict. We need peace for development. Peace is not an event; it is a process and community relationship is very important for us to attain peace."

For the Executive Director, Conflict Prevention and Peace Building Initiative (CPPBI), Jude Obuseh, there are underlying issues that have not been addressed in the area.

He said: "Most of the time we want to look at the immediate factors triggering these conflicts without paying attention to the structural and background factors responsible for these issues.

"The issue in Jos is a mismatch of political, ethnic and religious issues in the past that have not been resolved. So, it is the after effect that we are witnessing today in form of the crisis."

He noted that the crisis could be resolved with both immediate and long-term strategies.

"Most definitely, the security agencies have to come in to restore some peace and some form of confidence to assure the people in that environment that they are safe by providing security presence to deter further attacks," he said.

On the long-term measure, Obuseh said there has to be serious peace building. "They have to try and restore broken relationships, as most of the groups in that area are at loggerheads. This will involve the religious groups, traditional rulers and the government calling for a peace meeting in the affected communities.