

Lafia: A Peaceful Town Raped By Thugs

By Dada Ahmed

Lafia, capital of Nasarawa State, has been living up to its name as a peaceful settlement since the creation of the state by the regime of the late Gen. Sani Abacha in October 1996.

This is in view of the relative peace, tranquility and above all, high level of political tolerance of its compared with other states of the federation.

For those ignorant of the meaning of the name of the town, Lafia, it means a place of peace. However, there has been a growing concern in recent times among residents about the rising tide of political intolerance, degenerating into thuggery and other forms of violence to the chagrin of all peace-loving people not only in Lafia, but far and wide.

The event of July 9, 2006 speaks volumes of this palpable concern. On that day, most residents

engaged in the legitimate pursuit of their businesses had their peace truncated, as they had to run helter-skelter for dear life. This was due to the violent activities of supporters of two rival politicians warming up for the 2007 elections.

Between 8.30 a.m. and noon the hitherto peaceful Lafia town was turned into a theatre for flexing muscles by some political thugs armed to the teeth with all manner of lethal weapons. They made bonfires of tyres at conspicuous points in the streets of Lafia, thus instilling fear among members of the public.

At the end of what many critics described as the unnecessary display of political immaturity on the theatre of political madness, two people were said to have lost their lives. One of them, an innocent and law-abiding citizen, died from gunshot wounds he received during the unfortunate incident.

Many others, who survived the onslaught went home nursing various degrees of wounds, while those with serious wounds were admitted in various hospitals in the town.

An outpouring of condemnation, admonition as well as caution by a cross-section of the public trailed the event even as family members of the victims of the unfortunate incident bemoaned the loss of their dear ones, while others prayed for the survival of the wounded.

According to sources the seed of political discord was sown at one of the "turbanding" ceremonies near Lafia where a third class chief received his staff of office from the state government.

After the colourful ceremony, the thugs of the two political rivals came back to Lafia for re-enforcement the following day culminating into a large scale

disturbance, destruction of properties and loss of innocent lives.

Lending his voice, the Chief Imam of the state Secretariat mosque, Alhaji Mohammed Arikiya, described the Sunday episode as most unfortunate and a serious dent to the peaceful name of Lafia.

"It is most ironic to note that Lafia, which has enjoyed a long period of relative political stability and served as a haven for victims of communal unrest in other states of the federation to get embroiled in this kind of upheaval," he said.

He called on the youths to see themselves as leaders of tomorrow and desist from any acts capable of eroding such vital quality.

Arikiya advised political leaders to be ware of the implications of using youths as thugs to settle scores with perceived political opponents.

He also enjoined parents to

educate their children on moral values, and the need to be good citizens.

Contributing, Mr. Mathew Abimiku, of the Evangelical Reformed Church of Christ (ERCC) Lafia called on Nigerians to be closer to God and pray for peace to characterise the 2007 general elections in Nigeria.

He called on all stakeholders in the forthcoming elections to imbibe the culture of political tolerance, compromise, lobby and the belief in power lying in "the hands of God who gives to whom he wishes".

Members of the society cutting across all human endeavours, who barred their minds condemned the incident describing it as a sign of ugly experience that might bedevil the 2007 elections, if not nipped in the bud.

It is instructive to note that democracy is all about wellbeing of the people and any step taken to

elect people to the various political offices must be in furtherance of improvement on the living conditions of the electorates.

Followers of politics equally called on all registered political parties to fashion out a code of conduct for its members and advised that such code should punish any aspirant, who employed violence or used thugs to foment trouble in order to achieve electoral victory.

In the final analysis, it is instructive to remind politicians in the state, that as the thugs who perpetrated the last breach of peace in Lafia awaited the full arm of the law, they have it as a patriotic duty to the state and the nation to eschew politics of bitterness and rancour.

Lafia means peace and development and nothing short of this is expected of political aspirants and their followers.

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