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Jos Riots: Death Hits 400

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(With Agency Reports)

Residents delivered more bodies to the main mosque in Jos on Sunday, bringing the death toll from two days of clashes between Muslim and Christian gangs to about 400 people.

Rival ethnic and religious mobs have burned homes, shops, mosques, and churches in the violence sparked off by the dispute over council elections.

Plateau State Commissioner

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for Information, Nuhu
Gagara, disclosed that the

government is struggling to cater for over 10,620 displaced

persons scattered in different camps in the city.



First Lady, Turai Yar'Adua (right); wife of the Vice President, Patience Jonathan; and NAFDAC Director General, Dora Akunyili, after the conferment of honorary doctorate degrees on both Yar'Adua and Akunyili by Igbinedion University, Okada, Edo State ... at the weekend.

Jos Riots: Death Toll Hits 400

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cuts, those are the two main types," narrated Aboi Madaki, the Director of clinical services at the Jos University Teaching Hospital (JUTH).

The overall toll is expected to be higher, with some victims already buried and others taken to other clinics.

The violence appeared to have gone down on Sunday. Soldiers patrolled on foot and in jeeps to enforce a 24-hour curfew imposed on the worst-hit areas. People who ventured out walked with their hands in the air to show they were unarmed.

"They are still picking up dead bodies outside. Some areas were not reachable until now," said Al Mansur, a 53-year-old farmer who said all the homes around his had been razed.

Overturned and burnt-out vehicles littered the streets while several churches, a block of houses and an Islamic school in one neighbourhood were gutted by fire.

The Red Cross said about

7,000 people had fled their homes and were sheltering in government buildings, an Army barracks and religious centres. A senior police official said five neighbourhoods had been hit by unrest and 523 people detained.

The latest clashes between gangs of Muslim Hausas and mostly Christian youths began early on Friday, provoked after rumours spread that the All Nigeria Peoples Party (ANPP) candidate backed by Hausas had lost the race to the candidate of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP).

"It's religious. They were burning mosques and churches. They used politics as a cover-up," said Suleyman Yusuf, a Yoruba Muslim, two of whose friends were killed.

Yusuf was sheltering with some 4,000 men, women and children - Christian and Muslim, and from a variety of ethnic groups - in a building set up by aid workers.

Hundreds were killed in ethnic-religious fighting in Jos in 2001. Hundreds more died in

2004 in clashes in Yelwa, also in Plateau State, leading former President Olusegun Obasanjo to declare an emergency.

Unrest in the state has in the past triggered reprisal attacks between different ethnic and religious groups in other parts of Nigeria.

But the security forces appear to have reacted more quickly than in the past to contain the latest violence, with the Army sending in reinforcements from neighbouring states.

On Sunday, both Senate President, David Mark, and House of Representatives Speaker, Dimeji Bankole, advocated stiffer penalties for the perpetrators.

The Sultan of Sokoto, Sa'ad Abubakar, who is the President of the Supreme Council of Islamic Affairs in Nigeria, condemned the killings and also demanded the prosecution of those responsible, a view echoed by the Prelate of the Methodist Church Nigeria, Sunday

Ola Makinde, as well as *Afenifere*.

"It is wrong for any group of people to use the excuse of politics to deprive others of their right to live," Abubakar stressed.

Makinde urged the Federal Government "to fish out the culprits; what has the burning of churches got to do with politics."

"Nigeria belongs to all of us regardless of our religion or ethnicity and we are free to live wherever we want in Nigeria. We must call an end to this madness".

Mark advocated that "those who kill under the guise of religion should be punished severely. The people involved in the crisis are not religious people but miscreants who were out to cause problem for selfish reasons.

"People should not be allowed to hide under religion to perpetrate violence because there is no religion that encourages violence. The full weight of the law should be made to bear on whoever is found to be involved in the crisis, no mat-

ter the person's status."

Bankole, a Muslim who attended church service on Sunday, canvassed religious harmony, as "acrimonies between religions has been there from day one, but as leaders, we should show example to the people who will look up to us that we can do things together."

"Anybody found culpable should be punished and be made to face the full wrath of the law."

But *Afenifere* National Publicity Secretary, Yinka Makinde, noted that the orgy of killings was sparked off by the usual PDP's game of manipulating the electoral process with impunity, which has characterised their mantra of 'do-or-die' politics.

"The Jos response is just a tip of the iceberg of what we have always warned could happen when you push a people to the wall.

"It takes just a spark to ignite an unquenchable fire of angst bottled-up over a period of time. And, in a society where there are other welled-up social tensions, a conflagration is just a heartbeat away," he stated.