

FG Deploys Soldiers In Nasarawa

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The federal government has ordered the deployment of armed troops to Nasarawa State to assist the police in maintaining peace and order and halt the deteriorating situation there.

The director, army public relations unit, Brigadier General Ibrahim Attahiru, made this disclosure yesterday while briefing the media about the activities of the army. He spoke on behalf of the army chief, Lt Gen. Azubuike Onyeabo Ihejirika, at the Army Headquarters, Abuja.

He explained that the step was taken to prevent further escalation of the violence, which is happening in a senatorial district to every other part of the state. "Due to the heightened security situation in Nassarawa State, the federal government has ordered the deployment of NA troops in aid to civil authority in order to prevent further escalation of the violence and its spread to other parts of the state," he said. "It is gratifying to note that the deployment of NA troops to the violence-prone area has helped in curbing the spread of violence by the Ombatse and other ethnic militia groups in Nasarawa State. The federal and Nassarawa State governments are exploiting other ways of ensuring the quick return to normalcy."

He also said the newly created 7 Division Army, Maiduguri, has justified its existence with the successful operations being carried out against the Boko Haram insurgents in the areas where the terrorists are based: "The newly created 7 Division of Nigerian Army headquartered in Maiduguri which became operational on 22 August 2013 has continued to carry out high tempo counter-terrorist operations in its area of operational responsibility.

"As part of this effort, troops of the formation have conducted operation to pre-empt, dislocate and disrupt the insurgents' activities in the north-east. In the process, insurgent camps located at Kitumari, Alkaderi, Kurunmati, Abali, Gajiram and Iza within the Sambisa Forest have been destroyed. Other areas where insurgents' camps were attacked include Bulabulin and Ngaram within Maiduguri metropolis as well as Gulimba area of Gwoza."

He continued: "The Division continues to dominate the area through aggressive mobile patrols of highways and major urban centres as part of confidence building measure to facilitate the quick return to normalcy. All these efforts are aimed at denying the terrorists the freedom of action. By and large, military operation within the 7 Division area of responsibility has been largely successful."

He explained that, in the course of the counterterrorism effort, troops of the division killed a top Boko Haram commander who

is a high-value target, Abba Goroma, that a N10 million bounty was earlier set aside for his capture.

Speaking on the clash between the troops and the sect, Attahiru disclosed that on September 12, 2013, troops from 81 Battalion under 7 Division Nigerian Army acted on intelligence report gathered that the insurgents had regrouped at Kafiya Forest, located in Ngazai local government area of Borno State, which is well fortified with anti-aircraft and anti-tank guns mounted on vehicles, and were planning to launch an attack.

“Based on this report, our troops launched a deliberate attack; over 150 insurgents were killed and the formation lost an officer and 15 soldiers. On 17 September, 2013, in the aftermath of the insurgents’ defeat at Kafiya Forest, some fleeing insurgents carried out an attack on Benisheikh town in Kaga local government area of Borno State. In the process, a lot of civilians were killed by the insurgents. Our troops located at the Forward Operating Base on the outskirts of the town moved in to repel the onslaught and cleared Benisheikh town of insurgents. Several insurgents were killed and equipment destroyed. Our troops continue to carry out patrols to dominate the general area.”

Al-Makura sues for peace, assures on security

Meanwhile, Nasarawa State governor Tanko Al-Makura has appealed to the warring parties in the crisis that engulfed the state a week ago to sheathe their swords and give peace a chance, assuring that government was on top of the situation and working round the clock to ensure that the perpetrators of the barbaric act and their sponsors were brought to justice.

Al-Makura who cut short his medical trip abroad to return home for the resurging crisis sympathised with the families of those who lost their loved ones in the mayhem and appealed strongly that no one should consider any form of reprisal as the long arm of the law would surely catch up with those culpable.

Addressing journalists yesterday after over a four-hour security meeting at Government House, Lafia, Al-Makura said “we must fish out the bad eggs who have stigmatised the good name of this state so that those outside the state would know we are serious people and mean well for our citizens”.

“I want to assure all and sundry that this government is equal to the task and will see to it that the culprits are brought to book and also restore confidence in the security operatives,” he said, adding that “we will also enhance due process in bringing about peace”.

Boko Haram attacks claim 50, houses, shops razed

Just 11 days after the last terrorist attack in Borno State, insurgents believed to be Boko Haram members launched another chain of attacks from the night of Tuesday till yesterday morning on the military and residents of Benishiekh town in Kaga local government area of Borno State, killing dozens of residents, including security operatives, and throwing the whole area into anguish and pandemonium.

The gun attacks on people and burning and vandalism of houses, shops, stalls, offices, vehicles and other valuables spread panic among women and children who fled the town in large numbers, seeking refuge in neighbouring towns and villages.

Benishiekh is a major town located 75 kilometres from Maiduguri metropolis, the Borno State capital, and midway on the expressway from Yobe and Borno states, making it a daily busy route for travellers.

Witnesses told journalists on the condition of anonymity that “over 50 people were killed, over 60 houses burnt down, over 20 loaded trailer vehicles burnt down, over 20 private vehicles belonging to passers-by on their way to either Damaturu and Maiduguri also destroyed”.

They further said the manner the attack was carried out gave the impression that the insurgents were on a revenge mission.

“Unfortunately, apart from the 50 people that were slaughtered, the manner innocent people and vehicles as well as shops and stalls belonging to the people were set ablaze, it looks as if the Boko Haram insurgents were taking revenge and wanted to completely sack the whole town as if it was a war,” they said, adding, “We are aware that some JTF men were killed; bombs were set on them and their sheds as well as lodges at the Benishiekh International boarding school.”

They listed some of the places razed during the attack as Banishiekh FRSC Highway Office, part of the Kaga LGA secretariat, part of the Benishiekh Government Lodge, houses of prominent citizens of Benishiekh town residents, people's shops and stalls.

One witness spoke about the psychological trauma faced by the hundreds of residents of Benishiekh, women and children inclusive, who have now relocated to neighbouring towns and villages for safety as they saw how their loved ones were brutally killed or maimed by the insurgents.

According to him, the insurgents first attacked the military personnel with explosives before pouncing on the hapless residents.

"At the time of the incident, no military or security man was available or on ground as the insurgents directly launched the first attack on them immediately they invaded the town and set bombs on them before they moved into the town and started shooting sporadically, killing innocent people and sending everyone running. Some even slept in the bush before resurfacing this morning from their hideouts to pack their luggage and leave the town," he said.

LEADERSHIP learnt that the terrorists came dressed in military fatigue on Tuesday evening and attacked unsuspecting motorists on highway even before getting near to Benishiekh town, killing at least 50 people and abducting several others, eye witnesses and police authorities said.

Garba Ngamdu, a senior adviser to the governor on Labour matters who hails from Benishiekh confirmed the incident and said he could not give the exact figure of casualties but that many were killed in Benishiekh and least 100 houses, shops and vehicles burnt down.

He said: "Boko Haram gunmen attacked our town, killing many and burning several houses; no fewer than 100 houses had been counted. They also attacked motorists and killed several persons of which I cannot give actual figure of casualties," Ngamdu said.

Also confirming the incident to journalists in Maiduguri, the state police commissioner, CP Tanko Lawan, said the police authorities were aware of the incident but that it was yet to get enough details of the incident.

"It is an unfortunate incident that happened in Benishiekh, but we are yet to get details of what happened especially on casualty figure. We have sent a team of our men down there to ascertain what happened so that we can brief the press properly," he said.

A commercial driver, Haliru Ismail, who fell victim of the incident on his way to Damaturu was full of lament: "My vehicle is burnt and some of my passengers were shot also while others were taken away by the Boko Haram gunmen. The gunmen who attacked us were dressed like soldiers, and carrying heavy arms.

"After they stopped us they asked us all to come down from the bus, and then one of them hit me on the head with the butt of his gun. It was then I knew they were not soldiers and I fell to the ground and pretended to be unconscious. They started firing, and asking some others, including women, to enter their packed vehicles. They were more than 50 insurgents in number dressed in military uniforms that terrorised the town".

"At about 2pm, we saw about five JTF vehicles filled with armed military men on surveillance to and from the town, which still scared many people and they took to their heels, thinking they were the Boko Haram insurgents again on another mission. The town is empty; people have dissented it."

Rights commission partners Nasarawa on security challenges

The National Human Rights Commission yesterday said it would partner with the Nasarawa State government to tackle security challenges in the state.

Mrs Tina Nwodu, director of conflict, ethics and good governance of the commission, disclosed this while exchanging views with Mr Sani Yakubu-Hauwa, the state commissioner for local government and chieftaincy affairs, in Lafia.

"We are concerned about the loss of lives and destruction of properties that is taking place in Nasarawa state," she said. "And we are prepared to partner with the state government to ensure enduring peace and stability." Nwodu added that the

crisis has caused all kinds of abuse on law-abiding citizens, with children and women being the most affected victims.

Nwodu explained that the group would meet with the community leaders, women leaders, market associations and youth groups to discuss on peace and unity of the people of the state.

“Crisis does not just erupt; it has traces, and early warning responses will assist to get first-hand information for it to be nipped in the bud,” she said.

Mr Sani Yakubu-Awa, in his contribution, thanked the commission for coming to identify and sympathise with the state at its trying moment. “Your coming to the state now is timely, as government is willing to partner with all men and women of goodwill who are ready to assist the state in finding lasting peace.

Armed forces warn civilians against impersonation of personnel

The Nigerian Armed Forces on Wednesday warned members of the public against impersonating its personnel, saying use of its kitting and uniforms is prohibited.

Speaking at a press briefing held at the headquarters of the 9 Brigade Nigeria Army, located in Ikeja, Lagos, the commander of the brigade, Brigadier-General Adeniyi Oyabade, said the warning became necessary due to the incessant arrests of people impersonating armed forces personnel in Lagos State.

Oyabade, flanked by the commander of NNS Beacroft, Apapa, Commodore Eze Koba, and commander, 435 Base Support Group, Air Commodore S.J Wulcangha, said the public sensitisation serves as the final warning to the public, as anyone caught henceforth would be summarily dealt with.

He stated: “All our phones have camera now and we urge the members of public to effectively use their camera phones especially when they happened to be in the vicinity where criminal activities are being committed.”

The commander lamented that one major problem the armed forces were facing is the use of military outfit by youths for social activities: “You see them when they go to club and party on military camouflage, you see somebody putting on a trouser and a camouflaged T-shirt. It is not allowed. We will try as much as possible to make sure that military type of uniform is meant for the military. That will help us to improve our daily duties of checking criminality not only in Lagos State but in the country.”

Panic as gunfire erupts at Jigawa police command

Panic yesterday gripped residents of Dutse, the Jigawa State capital, following sporadic gunfire at the headquarters of the state police command. The shooting started at about 10pm and lasted for 45 minutes before it stopped.

When the incident started, many people, including motorists around the police command, were thrown into confusion and scampered to safety.

When contacted, the spokesperson of the state police command, Mr Abdul Jinjiri, confirmed the incident, and explained that the incident was started by a drunken policeman who started shooting sporadically inside the command.

Jinjiri added that when the drunken police officer started shooting unexpectedly, some of the officers on duty also shot in the air to alert others.

He said, “This is what happened, and as I am talking to you now, I am at the command and the drunken police officer has been arrested and detained.”

But when asked if there was any casualty, Jinjiri said, “We would brief you in the morning after we must have gathered all the details”.

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