

Okonkwo blasts FG over Gombe killing

VICE-CHAIRMAN of Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), Bishop Mike Okonkwo has blamed the federal government for the incessant killing of Christians in the Northern part of Nigeria.

Penultimate week, a Christian teacher, Mrs. Ajayi invigilating students in a government secondary school in Gombe state was beaten to death by students who reportedly accused her of "desecrating the Koran". The killing was coming on the heels of accusations of kidnap and forceful conversion of Christian youths by Islamic fundamentalists in the region notorious for religious violence.

At a press briefing last Tuesday in Lagos, an ostensibly incensed Okonkwo blamed the failure of government to prosecute past perpetrators of the crime for the continuous killing of Christians up North. This, he stated, emboldens them to kill Christians with impunity.

He said the silence of government on the series of attack was irresponsible and smacks of inability to promote peaceful co-existence in the nation.

Okonkwo, who is also the presiding Bishop of the Redeemed Evangelical Mission (TREM), however said the unprovoked attacks on Christians was becoming unbearable, warning that Christian leaders can no longer guarantee restraining Christian youths from revenge and reprisals.

"For too long the federal government has avoided touching the issue and the silence can easily be interpreted to mean their inability to secure the lives of the citizens of the country. If the government does not address it, then what is being advocated loud and clear is that every Christian in the north that feels insecure should return to the south immediately and those deployed to the north under any scheme, be it NYSC or any other federal initiative, should refuse to go", he said.

He revealed that CAN have done all with its powers to make government take appropriate steps to no avail, warning that "it is getting to a stage where we can no



•Okonkwo

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By Sunday Oguntola
longer restrain our youths". To avert such occurrences, he charged the government to bring those responsible for the killings to books.

He said, "We have had several cases of brutal killings yet no one has been prosecuted, no one has been sanctioned, the killings come and go and we pretend that all is well. All is not well; the government must rise up to the occasion and take a drastic step in the right direction. The waste of human lives must stop".

But beyond government's intervention, the fiery preacher informed that CAN was working out a permanent solution to the menace that has resulted to loss of many Christians up North.

On the forthcoming elections, Okonkwo called on politicians not to see the contest as do or die because "everybody cannot win". He said such desperation arose from the warped perception of leadership as a quick route to wealth and personal comfort at the

expense of others. According to him, true leadership is all about service and selflessness. When we begin to see leadership from this angle, he assured that the tussle for power will fade away.

He called on all to shun violence or any act capable of setting the nation on fire, pointing out that Nigeria had come a long way and God had been so good to the nation for any to make it disintegrate.

The immediate president of the Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria (PFN) also tasked the judiciary to be alive to its duties and act with dispatch in handling litigations arising from the elections.

On the same-sex marriage bill before the national assembly, Okonkwo called on lawmakers to drop it. According to him, "same sex is contrary to the plan of God. God created male and female and expects matrimony to be between male and female. We must not introduce anything that will destroy our family values," he warned.