

# Murder of Gombe teacher

**O**NCE again, Nigeria has been shaken by yet another senseless act of religious intolerance. For allegedly desecrating the Holy Quran, a secondary school teacher in Gombe State was lynched by her own students. The teacher, Mrs. Oluwatoyin Olusesan, a Christian, was vigiling an examination in Islamic Religious Knowledge (I.R.K) when she discovered that one of the students had brought unauthorised materials into the examination hall. She seized the books and threw them aside, only to be accused by the students of defiling Islam's holy book. Lying in wait for her, they beat her to death, set her car ablaze and torched three classroom blocks and other school buildings. The school principal who tried to protect her, was beaten up.

A country whose students cold-bloodedly conspire to kill their own teacher in the name of a religion whose central tenet is submission to the will of Allah needs to seriously re-examine itself. All our claims to respect for the sanctity of human life, strong spiritual values and common decency count for nothing when incidents like these happen. Nigeria should not be turned into a land of young killers where teachers are no longer safe in their own classrooms.

The Gombe outrage is not the first of its kind, but it is unusual in several respects. Mrs Olusesan's murderers were adolescents. They were not ignorant *almajiris* or street children, but supposedly literate, educated individuals. Regardless of whatever provocation they may claim, their act was premeditated rather than a spontaneous action: they knew what they wanted to do, and they did it. The fact that teenagers could behave like this, with no thought for the enormity of what they were doing, and without

considering its consequences, is a pointer to Nigeria's utter failure in dealing with religious crises.

Outbreaks of religiously motivated violence over the years tend to follow the same deplorable pattern: mayhem erupts in a particular community and spreads rapidly, security operatives struggle to restore order, a panel of enquiry is set up, and then everyone goes to sleep until the next outbreak of turmoil. Nobody, it seems, is ever made to answer for his or her roles in religious disturbances. Security operatives are never called to account for their tardiness in responding to the plight of fellow citizens. The victims of these crises are rarely compensated for their sufferings or offered sympathy in their grief. The persistent absence of appropriate remedial action has consequently led to the emergence of reprisal attacks, as aggrieved kinsmen take matters into their own hands.

It is time for Nigeria to squarely confront this ugly fact of its national life, and the tragic events in Gombe State should be the starting point. A thorough investigation must be undertaken into the incident. The culprits must be identified and punished according to the law.

Nigeria's failure to handle religious crises firmly, even-handedly and with dispatch has turned it into a country where religious values have been made to serve criminal ends. If this situation is to be reversed, all manifestations of religious intolerance must be identified and comprehensively stamped out. Mrs. Olusesan must not die in vain.