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Protest over college's relocation not political, says Olumilua

3/2/2009

Odunayo Ogunmola, Ado-Ekiti

A former Governor of the old Ono State, Evangelist Bamidele Olumilua, yesterday faulted the claims of the Ekiti State Government that Saturday's protest in Ikere-Ekiti over the bid to relocate the College of Education was politically-motivated.

Olumilua, who spoke with reporters, denied the government's allegation that he and other opposition leaders masterminded the peaceful protest, which turned violent.

He traced the crisis to the alleged violation of the law establishing The University of Education, Ikere-Ekiti (TUNEDIK).

But leaders of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) in Ekiti North Senatorial District called on Governor Olusegun Oni to approve the immediate relocation of the university to his hometown of Ifaki-Ekiti "to safeguard the lives of innocent students and staff."

The people of the community staged a demonstration against the planned relocation of the university to Ifaki, which they believed would make the town lose its identity and the population the college's presence had accorded the town.

One person was killed and 20 others arrested during the protest.

Describing the allegation linking him with the protest as "an accusation coming from a confused and unpopular government completely bereft of ideas on how to manage a simple problem", Olumilua said the issue was beyond politics.

He said some indigenes of Ikere, popularly known as the "Ibedos", had planned a protest over the issue but he and other elders of the town, including a former President of the Nigerian Bar Association (NBA), Chief Wole Olanipekun (SAN), prevailed on them not to do so.

Olumilua, who is also a chieftain of the Action Congress (AC), identified a group of youths, known locally as "Ward 12" as the arrowheads of the protest.

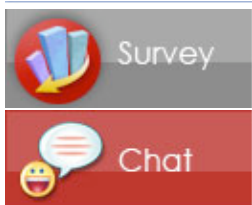
The former governor said the crisis would not have erupted had the Oni administration obeyed the law establishing the university, which stipulates that the college would be an institute under the university.

His words: "For any politician or government to start accusing me or the AC as being the masterminds of last Saturday's violence is not only unfortunate, but an accusation coming from an unpopular government that is completely bereft of ideas on how to manage a simple problem.

"Oni knows me personally that I will not stand in a place of confusion; it is a product of confusion and perplexity in their camp because there is so much confusion in the PDP because it is not an organised party and the issue on ground should not be mixed with politics.

"The law setting up the university and signed by the governor provides that the college will be an institute under the university and that the two are inseparable; but the question remains, why do you have to relocate the college which had been here for over 30 years, having internal and external affiliations and is a degree-awarding institution?

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"They are angry because we said they rigged election; didn't they rig the election? I tried to call him (Oni) but he did not pick my call; but Wole (Olanipekun) called him and got through to him and told him (Olanipekun) that we will meet on Saturday.

"They should leave us out of the crisis they caused. Why are you causing confusion and disharmony among Ekiti people? They are products of confused minds because when you want to establish an institution, why can't you start a college of agriculture or a state polytechnic?

"It is high time we set our priorities right, initiative and creativity are what we need, teacher-training is good but let us also promote information technology and technical education. Let us be creative and imaginative because without agricultural revolution there can be no industrial revolution."

But the PDP chieftains in Ekiti North urged Oni to relocate TUNEDIK to Ifaki.

The Ekiti North PDP Chairman, Mr. Tunde Adetifa, at a news conference in Ado-Ekiti, called on security agencies to arrest the sponsors and perpetrators of the Ikere mayhem.

Present at the conference were the Chief of Staff to the Governor, Mr. Segun Ilori, PDP Vice-Chairman in the zone, Chief Bodunde Daramola, the Personal Assistant to the Governor, Mr. Bunmi Ojo and the chairmen of the five local government areas making up the district.

Adetifa urged the House of Assembly to pass the law "to give effect to the wishes of the good people of Ekiti to have the university in Ekiti North Senatorial District for peace to reign."

He condemned what he called "the unwarranted and unprovoked violence unleashed on Ikere-Ekiti by miscreants and educated misfits."



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