

Five dead in Task Force, Boko Haram duel

By [Abiodun Joseph, Maiduguri](#) 13/07/2011 08:17:00



General Ihejirika

It was another bloody encounter yesterday in Maiduguri, the troubled Borno State capital city.

An Improvised Explosive Device (IED) was thrown into a moving military patrol vehicle near Fannah Dori Filling Station on Baga Road at about 8a.m. Soldiers fought back.

In a statement, the Joint Task Force (JTF) said: “There was an explosion at Baga road this morning targeted at a patrol team of JTF. Three of the attackers died in the blast and two soldiers were injured.”

But eyewitnesses said the three persons killed by soldiers might not be members of the fundamentalist Islamic sect Boko

Haram, who have seized the city by the throat.

Eyewitnesses claimed that two more bodies were evacuated by the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) near the scene of the incident, two hours after the early morning gun exchange. NEMA zonal Information Officer (North East) Ibrahim Farinloye said two bodies were picked near the scene of the incident, but declined to give details.

“We were just informed about the corpses but we are trying to assist traders in Baga market who were trapped following the bomb explosion this morning and the gun shots.

“We are negotiating with the NURTW in the market so as to help people check out of the place,” Farinloye said.

NEMA said another explosion affected its vehicle when officials of the agency were moving to the scene of the first blast on Baga road. He said only the agency vehicle was damaged, but nobody was injured.

The JTF statement signed by Colonel Victor Ebhaleme denied that soldiers were shooting indiscriminately.

The statement reads: “The Joint Task Force, Operation Restore Order in Maiduguri, wishes to debunk claims that soldiers are involved in any indiscriminate treatment of law abiding members of the public.

“The claims are baseless and uncalled for at a moment when the state is facing a challenging security situation. We want to reassure the general public that members of the JTF will never act in anyway

against the peace of the state.”

The JTF accused Boko Haram of planting Improvised Explosive Devices (IED) at residential areas, which exploded and damaged houses and vehicles.

Besides, it urged members of the public to disregard the rumour that people should leave Maiduguri. The JTF said soldiers would soon fish out the fundamentalists and “their sympathisers who resorted to spreading the rumour in order to instill fear in the people”.

Also yesterday, the Committee of Borno Elders and Leaders of Thought called for the immediate withdrawal of soldiers from the streets.

The elders said the coming of the soldiers has not helped the situation, which it described as getting worse.

The group issued a statement signed by Alhaji Shettima Ali Monguno, Imam Baba Gana Asil (the Imam Idaini of Borno), Alhaji Garba Abba Satomi, Alhaji Bukar Bolori, Alhaji Usman Gaji Galtimari, Alhaji Kyari Sandabe, Brigadier General Abba Kyari (rtd), Air Vice Marshal Al-amin Daggash (rtd), Alhaji Shettima Ali Kidaji, Ambassador Ahmed Yusufari, AIG Zanna Laminu Mamadi, AIG Muktar Alkali, Alhaji Tijjani Bolori, Alhaji Bulama Mali Gubio, Alhaji Umar Abba Shuwa, Alhaji Ibrahim El-Zubairu, Mallam Ibrahim Mustapha and Alhaji Gambo Gubio.

It said since the beginning of the conflict in Borno, the situation had been deteriorating and that the

intervention of the military, instead of bringing it under control, worsened it and made their expectation in them “grossly misplaced and shuttered”.

The elders and leaders of thought, who met on Tuesday, said: “the presence of thousands of weapons - brandishing soldiers on the streets of Maiduguri has turned the situation into a nightmare, the worst Maiduguri has ever seen.”

They also alleged that “hundreds of youths have been shot and killed by soldiers for no known reason other than they are young people.” “Many communities have been sacked and people, in their thousands, are fleeing Maiduguri and the level of human suffering in Maiduguri has reached its peak and Borno is faced with horrific and horrendous humanitarian crisis.”

The elders demand:

- “immediate withdrawal of all soldiers on the streets of Maiduguri as they have been burning down houses, killing innocent people, looting private property, harassing innocent passersby and even burning down cars and raping young girls”;
- “immediate rescue of fleeing masses and returning them to their houses and immediate provision of relief materials to the affected victims”; and
- replacement of soldiers by well-trained policemen who are versed in civil ways of enforcing internal

security without molestation.

The elders urged Boko Haram (Western education is evil) members to “see the current human suffering of fellow Muslims and look for alternative ways of pursuing their demand and consider the general public who are their brothers and sisters and do everything within their powers to ensure their safety”.

In a statement by Secretary to the State Government Baba Ahmed Jidda, the government said:

“Borno State Government and the Joint Task Force wish to assure the general public not to panic or migrate from their houses as adequate measures have now been taken by government to ensure that security operations would henceforth be undertaken with a human face and with absolute respect for the freedom of movement and peaceful abode of all citizens within the urban centres of Maiduguri Metropolitan and Jere local governments.”

The SSG said the government is not unmindful of the hardship being experienced by the public as a result of the ban on Achaba (motorcycle) operators.” He said the government will soon distribute tricycles and buses as palliative measures to ease the hardship.

Following Monday’s closure of the University of Maiduguri, other higher institutions in the state have closed down indefinitely.

Primary and secondary schools have equally been shut as a result of the security situation.

The exodus from Maiduguri has continued. Transport fares have skyrocketed. For instance, the Maiduguri to Abuja fare, which used to be N4,000, was N9,000 yesterday.