

Gunmen kill 22 travellers in Plateau

•Victims returning from religious event in Bauchi •Akeredolu warns against retaliatory attacks in Ondo

by **Kolade Adeyemi, Jos and Osagie Otabor, Akure** August 15, 2021 in **Featured, News Update**

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The Plateau State Police Command yesterday confirmed the death of 22 persons following an outbreak of violence on Rukuba Road in Jos, the state capital yesterday.

The police also confirmed the arrest of 12 suspects and the rescue of 21 people from the incident.

The corpses, it was gathered, were conveyed in two Hilux vans from the crisis spot to the mortuary of the Plateau Specialist Hospital.

Although the violent incident has been put under control, the city was enveloped in tension at press time yesterday.

Trouble began when some people suspected to be Irigwe youths attacked a convoy of five buses conveying some Muslim faithful who were heading to Ikare, Ondo State from the Annual Zikr prayer in Bauchi State.

For two days before the incident, Irigwe youths had announced that they would be conveying the corpses of their slain members for burial in Bassa yesterday.

They had set out in a convoy for the burial on yesterday morning when the incident occurred along Rukuba Road.

Confirming the incident, the spokesman of the Plateau State Police Command, Gabriel Ubah, an Assistant Superintendent of Police, said: "On 14/08/2021 at about 0928hrs, the Plateau State Police Command received a distress call that a group of attackers suspected to be Irigwe youths and their sympathisers along Rukuba Road of Jos North LGA attacked a convoy of five buses with Muslim faithful who were coming back from the Annual Zikr prayer in Bauchi State and heading to Ikare in Ondo State.

"Unfortunately, twenty-two (22) persons were killed and fourteen injured in the attack.

"Upon receipt of the report, a team of police personnel, the military and other sister agencies were immediately mobilised to the scene where seven victims were rescued and six suspects arrested.

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"The Commissioner of Police, Plateau State Command, CP Edward Egbuka, along with the GOC 3-Division, Major General Ibrahim Ali, also visited the scene and ordered for a discreet investigation to fish out other perpetrators of this barbaric act at large.

"Normalcy has returned to the area.

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“The CP warned that those that perpetrated this dastardly act and others that incited it will be made to face the full wrath of the law.

“The Command urges the public to remain calm and to furnish the police with useful information that will aid the investigation that a group of attackers suspected to be Irigwe youths and their sympathisers along Rukuba Road of Jos North LGA attacked a convoy of five buses with Muslim faithful who were coming back from the Annual Zikr prayer in Bauchi State and heading to Ikare in Ondo State.”

Also, troops of Operation Safe Haven (OPSH) deployed to restore law and order, in a statement made available to newsmen in Jos, said that yesterday, it swiftly responded to distress calls that suspected hoodlums blocked Jos North Junction along Rukuba Road in Jos North Local Government Area and attacked some commuters.

The statement signed by Major Ishaku Gaji Takwa, the military information officer, further said that troops immediately mobilised to the scene and restored normalcy.

“Some persons including innocent commuters lost their lives in the unfortunate incident while others with varying degrees of injuries have been evacuated to a medical facility for care. Their condition is being closely monitored,” the statement said.

OPSH further said that 12 suspects had been arrested in connection with the incident while troops were on the trail of others who took part in the heinous act.

Reacting to the violent incident, the governor of Plateau State, Simon Lalong, condemned the killings, especially as it involved innocent commuters.

He directed security agencies to swiftly identify and arrest the perpetrators.

A statement signed by his Director of Press, Simon Macham, reads in part: “Governor Simon Lalong has warned trouble makers bent on fomenting trouble in Plateau State to desist as the government will not allow any form of lawlessness to disrupt the peace of the state.

“Lalong said attacks on innocent citizens, no matter their backgrounds, will never be tolerated in Plateau State, and those who are found to be behind such attacks will be dealt with decisively to serve as deterrence and restore public order.

“The Governor however commends security agencies for their immediate response, leading to the arrest of some suspects and the restoration of calm to the area.”

The Governor also commiserated with the families of those affected and assured all law abiding citizens that security has been beefed up around the area as well as the entire metropolis to forestall further breach of the peace.

He reminded the citizens to remain vigilant and be security conscious in reporting suspicious persons and behaviour within their domains to enable law enforcement agencies to respond appropriately.

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Lalong also directed the Secretary to the Government of the State, Prof. Danladi Atu, to visit the areas and ascertain the situation as well as ensure that those injured receive adequate medical attention.

The peace of the state has been dented with a series of violent incidents in recent times, leading to several deaths and destruction of properties, especially in Bassa and Riyom Local Government areas.

The governor has repeatedly warned that violence merchants would not be allowed to have their way in the state.

Condemning the killings in a statement, Senator Istifanus Gyang representing Plateau North said he received the news with rude shock.

Gyang said that no citizen should be made to suffer or lose his/her life simply on the basis of ethnicity or religion, adding that crime has no ethnic or religious coloration, hence should be confronted and dealt with frontally by the law enforcement agencies.

The senator expressed his “deepest sympathy and condolences” to the families of the victims and urged all residents of Jos City and Plateau North Senatorial District to pray and discountenance thoughts and actions that may give room for criminals to plunge the state into chaos.

Akeredolu warns against retaliatory attacks

Ondo State Governor, Oluwarotimi Akeredolu, yesterday cautioned the people of the state against carrying out any retaliatory attack over Saturday's killing of some Ondo State indigenes in Plateau State.

Governor Akeredolu who called for calm in a press statement issued by his Chief Press Secretary, Richard Olatunde, said an unconfirmed number of deaths had been recorded while some persons were severely injured in the said attack.

The statement said the true identity of the victims would soon be unraveled.

Governor Akeredolu said he had received a call from his Governor of Plateau State, Solomon Lalong, adding that it was a case of mistaken identity.

The Ondo State governor, who urged the people to refrain from any hasty colouration of the incident, cautioned them against taking the law into their hands.

The statement said: "The victims, according to preliminary reports, took a route where crisis between Muslims and Northern Christians had ensued for some time, and that they may have been possibly mistaken for aggressors. Accordingly, either of the two feuding groups in the area could be responsible in this regard.

"I have spoken with my brother Governor in Plateau, and he has assured me that the situation is under control. I want to plead with our people to remain calm.

'From the report I gathered, it is clear some were killed while many others who are injured have been taken to the hospital for medical attention.

"Let me again make it clear that I was informed by my colleague that it was, indeed, a case of mistaken identity.

"I want to assure our people living in Plateau that they are not targets of any religion or ethnic crisis.

"While assuring that justice will be served, I want to plead again that we do not take the law into our hands. Let us remain calm.

"I also want to commiserate with the family of all those who have lost their lives in this unfortunate incident. We mourn the departed and feel the pains of their loved ones."