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Jos: 416 victims get mass burial

By Jude Owuamanam and Tobi Soniyi, Published: Tuesday, 9 Mar 2010

A A A A A

Confusion enveloped Jos on Monday as no fewer than 416 people who were victims of the sectarian violence in three communities in Shen village of Jos South Local Government Area were given a mass burial in Dogon Na Hauwa, one of the hamlets involved in the pre-dawn massacre.

The burial, which was done in three massive graves, was heralded by a mass protest by thousands of Berom youths who vowed to revenge last Sunday's killings of their kith by a band of marauding Fulani herdsmen.



Scenes from a mass burial organised for the victims of the sectarian violence in Jos... on Monday

It was a solemn occasion as men, women and kids wailed uncontrollably as the bodies of their loved ones were taken from the truck and laid in the shallow graves by men of the Nigerian Security and Civil Defence Corps.

The Chairman of the Recovery and Evacuation Committee, Mr. Solomon Zang, told journalists at the burial site on Monday that the death toll might rise to 600 as more corpses were still being picked along the rocky and hilly villages of Dogo Na Hauwa, Ratsat and Zot.

He said that so far, 380 bodies had been buried in three graves at Dogon Na Hauwa, while 36 others were still awaiting burial at Zot village, a few kilometres away.

The villagers had earlier rejected the idea of the mass graves, but Zang said that the rejection was because the villagers thought that the bodies would be lumped together in the grave.

He said, "The disagreement arose because they thought we would just use bulldozer to dump the bodies inside the graves, but we told them that we will give the victims a dignifying burial by arranging them one after the other inside the grave and that was what we did."

Thick stench of decomposing bodies filled the air as people blocked their noses with their clothes and handkerchiefs.

But as the ceremony was going on, three former Heads of State, Gen. Yakubu Gowon, Alhaji Shehu Shagari and Chief Ernest Shonekan, were trapped in a hotel during a late morning melee that caught the residents unawares.

The three ex-heads of state were in Jos for a peace building conference which was organised by the Institute for Good Governance and Social Research in Jos on Monday.

The participants, who also included the Plateau State Governor, Mr. Jonah Jang, his deputy, Mrs. Pauline Tallen, and a host of other dignitaries were in the conference hall of the Hill Station Hotel, when pandemonium broke out.

The whole Jos and Bukuru metropolis were thrown into utter confusion as people ran helter-skelter following news that Berom youths were protesting.

Shops and banks were hastily closed while parents ran to schools to pick their children who had earlier resumed Monday classes.

Traffic was clogged up as cars ran at break-neck speed to escape the melee. All the dignitaries were trapped at the conference centre until about 4pm when all the streets were totally deserted.

The streets were taken over by combat-ready soldiers in bullet-proof vests, while traders who had closed shops hurried to their homes on foot.

The protesting youths blocked highways and chanted war songs. Eyewitnesses said the protest became

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bloody when a soldier shot into the air to disperse the crowd. He was said to have mistakenly shot one of his colleagues, who died instantly.

Meanwhile, the National Chairman of the Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria (youth wing), Dr. Abel Damina, on Monday berated the Fulani over the renewed violent attack on Christians in Jos, Plateau State.

He said the killings and destruction were unwarranted and another show of the resolve of the fundamentalists to Islamise Nigeria.

Damina said in a statement that the sight of the victims as shown in the media was as gory as it was provocative.

He said, "I watched the report given by the CNN and BBC on the 'Jos crisis' and I felt sad when the reporters implied that the Christians attacked first. Never in the history of any religious crisis in this country had Christians attacked first."

The Army spokesman, Lt.-Col. Galadima Shekari, told our correspondent that more soldiers had been deployed on the streets of Jos to beef up security.

He, however, denied knowledge of the killing of a soldier by his colleague.

He said, "The situation is now calm, having survived that early morning scare, but at least, from information given to me, I can confirm to you that the army are in full control.

"I swear that I don't know of the incident you are talking about (shooting of a soldier) and nothing like that has been reported to me."

Also, the Plateau State Police Command said that 93 persons, mostly Fulani, had been arrested in connection with the attacks.

The command also said that only 55 people were killed in the incident.

Police Public Relations Officer, Mr. Mohammed Larema, an Assistant Superintendent of Police, told our correspondent in a telephone interview that 19 Fulani herdsmen were arrested in Angware, Jos East Local Government Area, while 74 others, made up of mixed tribes, were arrested in Mangu.

He also confirmed that the incident was a reprisal attack by the Fulani herdsmen against the people of Dogon Na Hauwa, Ratsat and Jeji.

Larema added that most of the suspects were arrested with blood stained clothes.

Meanwhile the Federal Government on Monday said that emergency security measures had been put in place to forestall any reprisal attack in Jos.

Speaking while receiving a draft national policy on torture, the Attorney-General of the Federation and Minister of Justice, Mr. Adetokunbo Kayode (SAN), expressed sadness over the fresh extra-judicial killings in Jos South Local Government Area of Plateau State.

He, however, said that the government would deal decisively and according to the law with all those involved in the mayhem.

He said that the government was determined to put an end to violence in Jos.

He assured Nigerians that there would be no recurrence of the unfortunate incident even as he announced that emergency security measures had been put in place by the government to forestall any further reprisal attack.

He said the draft policy came at a time when it was most needed, adding that he would take the input of the nation's security chiefs before preparing a bill on the matter.

He asked anyone with information or complaints on the unfortunate Jos incident or those that occurred before in either Jos or any part of the country to forward them to the National Committee on Torture for immediate probe and necessary actions.

He said that the committee had been empowered to receive and investigate communications from Nigerians on cases of torture and extra-judicial executions.

He said, "For emphasis, the committee will investigate reports from the National Human Rights Commission and local and international human rights groups."

According to him, the documentary of Aljazeera and the reports of Amnesty International are relevant materials in this regard.

He said, "Ultimately, we realise that these interventions will only be sustainable when we adopt a holistic view of our criminal justice system and of the reforms required.

"The process of reform is on-going. The Federal Ministry of Justice will aggressively pursue reforms across all institutions of the justice sector.

"I have indicated that I will shortly be presenting a memorandum to the Federal Executive Council on specific interventions that should urgently be taken with a view to restoring effectiveness and citizens' confidence in our justice system."

Mr. Dalyop Gyang, who escaped the carnage, said, "We were caught unawares. We were alarmed by gun shots at about 2am, and as we tried to escape, the Fulani who were already waiting, slaughtered many of us."

Commissioner for Information, Mr. Greg Yenlong, who was also at the scene of the incident, told journalists that the casualty figure could not be ascertained because more bodies were still being brought out from the burnt houses. He described the incident as "unfortunate."

Meanwhile, the Federal Government, had, before the outbreak of Sunday's reprisal attack, said that arrangements were in the pipeline to criminalise torture and extra-judicial executions in the country.

Kayode made the disclosure in his office while meeting with members of the National Committee on Torture.

He admitted that the government was scandalised by the Aljazeera documentary on extra-judicial killings in the country.

He however vowed that the allegation implied in the documentary would be investigated with culprits brought to book.

Comments :

Its disheartening to know that we still have such devilish people among us. I wonder who they represent, just like shawn said, i am also in support of a state of emergency in the state. Seriously, as much as i do not believe in divided Nigeria, i sincerely think the perpetrators of such barbaric act should be brought to book. I sympathize with the families of the dead people. May God in his infinite mercy show mercy to the dead souls and grant them eternal rest.

Posted by: Adeola Babatunde Esq , on Tuesday, March 09, 2010

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I have said it here before and I will say it again. Southerners should stop calling themselves Nigerians. We should start the separation by identifying ourselves as citizens of Southern Nigeria like in South/North Korea. By doing this, the whole world we know how to separate us from all these blood suckers and terrorist in the North. This is the only language they will understand. We must be one in the South and move on with our own separate country. We have to start now. Its time we move on...

Posted by: Senikola James , on Tuesday, March 09, 2010

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i just want to use this medium to tell everybody to be very careful because nothing can be done by the government of this nation from the way i can see things, Lets turn to God. this is just an end time signs, Please Repent of all your sin. If i have my way i would have declared a state of emergency to deal with those culprits in Jos. Rest in Peace to those who lost their life Untimely, May God grant their love one the ability to bear the lost. Stand up Nigeria & defend the innocent.

Posted by: Asije , on Tuesday, March 09, 2010

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My candid opinion is that a state of emergency should be declared in Plateau state and the military should take over completely. The politicians in the state are not up to the task of protecting the lives of innocent citizens, even little innocent babies, helpless old men and pregnant women. They are clowns and puppets only there for their own selfish gain. All I know is that those who live by the sword, shall die by the sword. Its inevitable!!

Posted by: Shawn , on Tuesday, March 09, 2010

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Without the intention or any sort of inclination to playing tribalism or ethnicism. When will the northerners be integrated with the rest of the country? When will Islamic become peaceful religion? When will 1914 amalgamation really take place? When will Lord Lugard's soul ever rest in peace? When will Mohamed followers learn to coexist with whatever religion anyone choses? When will Mohamed himself resuscitate to tell his followers how they are misinterpreting the Holy Koran? When will the nort

Posted by: Julius Onny , on Tuesday, March 09, 2010

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