


# Plateau wants troops probed as gunmen kill 30

25th January 2024

| James Abraham and Umar Yakub

The Plateau State Government has called on the military authorities to probe the allegation of bias levelled against  
 Gunmen  
nent Area, where 30 persons were killed on Wednesday.

The Plateau State Commissioner for Information, Musa Ashoms, who made the demand in an interview on Wednesday, also appealed to the people of the state to embrace peace.

The development followed the allegations by the Chairman of the Christian Association of Nigeria in the Mangu LGA, Rev Timothy Daluk, and the Director of Public Affairs, Mwaghavul Development Association, Lawrence Kyarshik, that the military aided the attackers who torched several houses and destroyed properties during the violence.

The Christian body and the MDA questioned the failure of the troops to stop the killings and also demanded the withdrawal of the military from the crisis area.

Speaking on the allegation levelled against the troops, the commissioner stated, “I did not personally go to Mangu but we want the security agents to look into such allegations and make sure that people don’t feel cheated or feel they have taken sides already. The idea behind them going to Mangu is to stop the insurrection and carnage. We cannot have our communities going through these things over and over again.”

### **Defence headquarters**

The Defence headquarters could not be reached for an explanation on why the attack occurred despite the deployment of troops in the local government area.

The Director, Media Operations, Maj Gen. Edward Buba, did not respond to calls seeking his comment. He had yet to respond to a message sent to his phone.

Armed men had on Wednesday morning launched a fresh attack in the state, killing no fewer than 30 victims in Kwahaslalek village in the Mangu Local Government Area of the state.

The latest attack is happening one month after 195 persons were gruesomely massacred in the Barkin Ladi, Mangu, and Bokkos LGAs of the state last Christmas Eve.

About 221 houses were burnt, including other properties worth millions of naira.

However, the Plateau State Police command said eight suspects had been arrested in connection with the December 24 killings.

Speaking on the violence, the Chairman of CAN, Daluk, who decried the situation, accused the military of aiding the militia to attack and kill the natives.

The cleric said, “The military are the ones allowing the Muslims to burn our houses in Mangu. They have chased away all the Christians in New Market and the Muslims are allowed to do what they like.

“The military is enforcing the curfew in Christian-dominated areas in Mangu while in the Muslim area, there is no curfew. The military killed three people and one of them is my church member.

“I reported the matter to the security but at first, they denied that their members were responsible until I brought evidence to show that their soldier killed the victims and then they turned round to say that those soldiers were fake. So, that is the situation in Mangu.”

In a statement on Wednesday by their Director of Public Affairs, Kyarshik, the Mwaghavul ethnicity nationality questioned the failure of the troops who were deployed in the area to stop the attacks and killings.

They demanded the withdrawal of the military from the crisis area.

The statement read, “The leadership of the Mwaghavul Development Association is saddened by the current breakdown of law and order in Mangu town which began on Monday 22nd and continued on Wednesday 24th, January 2024 without any resistance from the security (forces).

“This unfortunate event is currently going on under the watchful eyes of the military which has failed to give protection to law-abiding residents of Mangu.”

The group recalled the governor’s failed attempt to halt the violence through the curfew, blaming the killings on “jihadists.”

It said, “The Executive Governor of Plateau State, Caleb Mutfwang, yesterday in a swift reaction to curtail the situation imposed a 24hr curfew in Mangu Local Government only for the Fulani Jihadists to unleash mayhem on Kwahaslalek leaving over 30 people dead, houses completely raised down and properties including food items destroyed with fire.

“One then wonders how these criminals operated without any resistance from the security personnel already deployed in the local government.

### **Curfew stays**

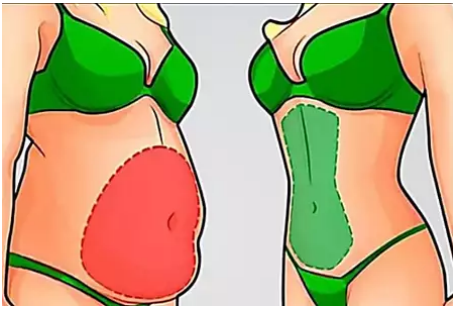
“Sadly enough, a security alert received on Monday 22nd had shown that there were pending attacks in Mangu and other places, yet the carnage went on unhindered.

“As if that is not enough, even within Mangu, the Muslims took advantage of the curfew to burn down houses, killing unsuspected persons and destroying properties and churches.”

“The MDA frowns at the activities of some of the military personnel who appear to be complacent in carrying out their constitutional duties they swore to protect all citizens of the country irrespective of tribe and religion.

“Eye witness report has it that while the military sent our people away, they watched the Muslims burn down houses.”

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The group said they were losing confidence in the military “because their actions are clear that they have taken sides.”

“Consequently, we wish to demand the complete withdrawal of the military to be replaced by MOPOLS and NSCDC as their roles in this conflict are highly suspicious.

“At the moment, our people are left at the mercy of God and the little they can do in self-defence,” the community lamented.

The Chairman, Miyetti Allah Cattle Breeders Association of Nigeria, in the Mangu LGA, Bello Shanono, said anybody who visited Mangu would be shocked by the level of destruction.

According to him, with the damage done to Muslims and their property, any right-thinking person would query the whereabouts of the security operatives deployed in the area.

While faulting the allegation that the troops were supporting Muslims in the crisis, the Fulani leader said it was the state security outfit that even served as “an advance team to the Christian attackers whenever they came and sent Muslims out of their homes.”

### Plateau operatives

He said, “If you enter the Mangu Local Government Area now, the entire northern axis around Char road, there is no house owned by a Muslim that was not burnt. The central Jummat mosque of Jawo was burnt yesterday, and today, they burnt the houses behind the stadium.”

Shanono alleged that Operation Rambo operatives had been causing confusion and tension in the town, stressing that they collaborated with the Christian attackers.

“Their motive of claiming troops giving cover to Muslims is to get sympathy,” he alleged.

Dozens of communities were deserted following the fresh round of killings which occurred despite the declaration of a 24-hour curfew on the Mangu LGA by Governor Caleb Mutfwang on Tuesday, to arrest the deteriorating security situation in the area.

The attack, which had the security agencies on the back foot, affected mostly women, children and the elderly.

In Mangu town, five family members including a father, mother and three children who were trying to escape the escalating violence were said to have been set ablaze on Wednesday.

The victims, who were mostly women and children, had fled to the house of a community leader in the area Tuesday night for safety following unrest earlier in the day in Mangu town. Still, they were reportedly surrounded by the gunmen who murdered them in cold blood.

About six mosques and two churches were reportedly razed in the mayhem.

The trouble began after some thieves allegedly tried to steal cattle but the incident subsequently snowballed into a violent clash leading to deaths and destruction.

Young men from both the Mwagaful community and the Fulani allegedly targeted places of worship.

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A community leader, Mark Haruna, confirmed the death toll to The PUNCH in Jos on Wednesday.

Mark said, "What happened at Sabon Gari and Mangu town yesterday afternoon (Tuesday) was just a distraction so that the attention of the people will be shifted away from the villages.

"For the second time, my village Kwahaslalek (Behind NYSC camp) came under attack by gunmen yesterday (Tuesday) night. They came at about 12:30 am and killed over 25 people mostly women and children."

The Chairman of the Mwaghavul Development Association, Joseph Gwankat, also confirmed the killings, describing them as callous.

“I couldn’t sleep last night as a result of what happened in Mangu town yesterday. Now, I have just been told Kwahaslalek village was attacked last night and about 30 people were killed.

“From what I was told, the unrest in Mangu town yesterday created fears in many communities. Some people in the village evacuated their loved ones and assembled them in a place which they thought was safe.

“So, in the night, the killers went to Kwahaslalek village where the people, mostly women and children, were assembled and killed all of them,” he narrated.

The chairman while condemning the attack, said he was informed that the security agencies were not available to protect the villagers.

He added, “I was told that no security was on the ground to save the villagers. This act is pure wickedness. How can people who are in their villages be targets of constant attacks and killings without anything being done to stop the perpetrators? “

The spokesman for the state police command, Alabo Alfred, said he had yet to get the report of the incident.

“I have not gotten any report on that. Let me call my commander. We will investigate the incident if something like that happened,” the PPRO said.

Speaking to one of our correspondents, Saidu Jauro, the youth leader of Miyetti Allah in Mangu, said they were yet to ascertain the number of lives lost in the attack.

He said, “As of now, we can’t say the number of our people that were lost. But, yesterday (Tuesday), we lost 15 people. During yesterday’s clash, I lost two of my family members.

“I was earlier informed about another person in my family who was killed in Unguwan Maijirgi. As I speak to you now the air is polluted by the noise of gunshots and everywhere is darkened by smoke. And this is the situation we are in.”

Saidu further stated, “The present happening in Mangu is just killings and burning down of houses.”

He explained that despite the effort by the security agencies to contain the crisis, the situation has not calmed as every part of the town is on fire. According to him, the curfew imposed by the state government is not effective, noting that people were attacking one another.

He, however, disclosed that they had informed the security operatives about the flashpoints.

The Fulani youth leader accused the state security outfit, ‘Operation Rambo’ of giving cover to their opponents to burn people’s houses.

He listed Unguwan Mai Jirgi and Gangare among the areas burnt down.

A student of Arewa College of Health, Mangu Sani said the situation was horrendous.

She said, “As a healthcare student, I am currently helping victims to nurse their injuries and we are here with no food, no water to drink; only surviving on God’s protection.”

On the security situation, she said, “The security (operatives) around the location I am in is Operation Rambo and they are also killing any person on sight.”

Another resident, who pleaded anonymity, said the casualties could not be ascertained.

“I know of a friend whose five family members were burned alive. This happened without any aid from the security (personnel) as they refused to go to the area claiming that it was not their duty post.”

He said most of the attacks occurred in the remote areas.

The state chapter of the Jama’atu Nasril Islam condemned the resurgence of violence in Mangu while absolving its members of involvement in the violence.

In a statement by its Secretary-General, Dr. Salim Umar, the Muslim association said it was unfortunate the situation degenerated into an ethno-religious crisis during which places of worship were torched.

*Umar blamed the escalating situation on the poor implementation of the curfew “because the security personnel are obviously overstretched.” He also alleged compromise by some operatives and expressed worry over the situation.*

He stated, “Reports from Mangu town this morning are not encouraging as places of worship and faith-based schools were torched and demolished while the killing continues again.

“Residents are decrying the negative role of the state government security outfit codenamed ‘Operation Rainbow’, accusing them of glaring partisanship.

“We call on the government and security agencies to intensify their efforts in securing the lives and properties of the inhabitants of Mangu and other flashpoints. All concerned should also do everything possible to prevent any possible escalation.

“Security agents should be on the lookout for possible infiltrators as it is widely alleged that some hired killers are on the prowl with the intent to carry out massive attacks on Muslims in the community. This is an act that shouldn’t be allowed to happen.”

“Peace is priceless. We all must strive to restore sanity in an open and unbiased manner by all stakeholders.”

Meanwhile, many residents of Mangu have fled their homes for fear of being killed.

Some of them who spoke with The PUNCH from the bush and other hideouts called on the state government to come to their rescue.

A resident of Mangu, Samson Haruna, said he narrowly escaped death after his neighbour’s house located near the New Market was razed.

He noted, “It is by the grace of God that I was able to escape. They burnt my neighbour’s house in the New Market area and when I saw them coming towards my house, I escaped through the window. As I speak with you, I’m hiding behind a rock. I don’t know what has happened to my house.”

John Bartholomew, who said he was speaking from the bush where he was hiding, decried the calamity that had befallen the town.

“My problem is how to escape to a safer place. Since afternoon, some of us who escaped have been hiding in the bush. We don’t know what will happen to us if we come out because we hear that the road is not safe.

“I have just been told that some of our kinsmen who went to bury their brother in Amper nearly Kanke were attacked on the road in Mangu while returning. The vehicle conveying them was burnt.

“Please, help us tell the government that the situation in Mangu requires drastic action,” Bartholomew pleaded.

Appraising the crisis, a group, the Initiative for a Better and Brighter Nigeria said that the security situation in Plateau State and other parts of the country had reached an alarming level and should not be allowed to continue.

National President of the group, Isa El-Buba, who addressed a press conference in Jos on Wednesday, called on President Bola Tinubu to consider the establishment of state police as a way of solving the problem.

El-Buba said, “We call on President Tinubu to once again consider the reworking of our laws to enable the creation of functional State police across states that can serve everyone.

*“May I use this medium, to call on all the state governors to exert their membership of the Nigerian Police Council which is somewhat the highest administration and supervising body of the Nigeria Police Force to make robust, far-reaching contributions as well as oversights and inputs for reforms within the institution that will make it meet up and tackle contemporary internal security challenges.”*



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