

Clashes subside in Nigerian city, some fighting nearby 20 Jan 2010 08:32:20 GMT

Source: Reuters

- * Uneasy calm restored in central city of Jos
- * Soldiers, police enforce 24-hour curfew
- * Reports of gangs dressed in fake security uniforms

By Shuaibu Mohammed

JOS, Nigeria, Jan 20 (Reuters) - Clashes between Muslim and Christian gangs subsided on Wednesday in Nigeria's central city of Jos, but sporadic gunfire could be heard in neighbouring communities as fighting spread to other parts of Plateau state.

Hundreds of soldiers and police were stationed throughout the state's capital city to enforce a 24-hour curfew, which has left many streets deserted and businesses closed.

At least 151 residents have been killed in four days of clashes, a senior mosque official said, with more bodies expected to arrive later on Wednesday at the city's main mosque.

"The fighting has stopped in Jos, but we can hear gunshots in other communities in the outskirts of the city. We are expecting more corpses to be brought in from surrounding communities later today," said Muhammad Tanko Shittu, a senior mosque official organising mass burials.

The official police figures were significantly lower with 20 people dead, 40 injured and 168 arrested since Sunday.

Vice President Goodluck Jonathan, in his first use of executive power, ordered troops to Jos on Tuesday to restore calm and prevent a repetition of clashes in November 2008, when hundreds of residents were killed in the country's worst sectarian fighting in years.

It was not clear whether President Umaru Yar'Adua, who has been in hospital in Saudi Arabia for nearly two months, had been briefed on the situation.

This week's violence erupted after an argument between Muslim and Christian neighbours over the rebuilding of homes destroyed in the 2008 clashes.

The fighting is unlikely to have a big impact on sub-Saharan Africa's second biggest economy. Its oil industry is in the south and its banking sector mainly in the commercial capital Lagos.

MAINLY GUNSHOT WOUNDS

The city's main hospital, Jos University Teaching Hospital, treated about 50 patients on Tuesday and was forced to turn away others. Two died from their injuries. "Ninety percent of the casualties were from gunshot injuries with a few from knives and bows and arrows," said Dr. Dabit Joseph, who works at Jos University Teaching Hospital.

The Red Cross has 40 staff workers and several volunteers at seven centres in Jos to help thousands of displaced residents, an agency spokesman said.

Residents said most people were staying indoors because of rumours that some gangs were dressed up in fake military and police uniforms.

"Government has received with concern reports of men in fake security uniforms attacking unsuspecting citizens. Measures are being put in place to tackle this issue," Plateau State Governor Jonah Jang said late Tuesday.

Nigeria has roughly equal numbers of Christians and Muslims, although traditional animist beliefs underpin many people's faiths.

More than 200 ethnic groups generally live peacefully side-by-side in the West African country, although 1 million people were killed in a civil war between 1967 and 1970 and there have been outbreaks of religious unrest since then.

Jos has been the centre of several major religious clashes in Africa's most populous nation.

The November 2008 clashes killed around 700 people, according to U.S.-based Human Rights Watch, while more than 1,000 Jos residents died in similar fighting in September 2001. (Writing by Randy Fabi; Editing by Giles Elgood) (For more Reuters Africa coverage and to have your say on the top issues, visit: <http://af.reuters.com/>) (For Interactive factbox on Nigeria please click on <http://uk.reuters.com/news/factbox?fj=20090902150153.js&fn=Poverty%20and%20anger%20in%20Nigeria>)



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