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### Henry Umahi

**On June 1, Pastor Emanuel Beliya and his wife, Juliana, were killed while working on their farm at Maraban Baissa in Donga Local Government Area of Taraba State by suspected Tiv militia.**

The killing of the cleric and his wife occurred few days after six Fulani and two Jukun were ambushed and killed by suspected militia along Wukari-Rafin Kada Road in southern part of state. The killings came when efforts were being made to reconcile Tiv and Jukun by the state government.

Reacting over the incident, Governor Darius Ishaku condemned the killing of the pastor and his wife by suspected militia, calling it wicked and inhuman.

He said through his senior special assistant on media and publicity, Bala Danabu, that killings of this nature have happened too often recently in southern Taraba communities.

The governor also described the killing as unhelpful to the ongoing efforts of the state government to achieve lasting peace among communities in southern Taraba.

According to records, the conflict has been recurring since 1959. And over the years, blood has been flowing in the area. Indeed, the Tiv/Jukun crisis has consumed scores of lives even as it assumed different dimensions. At a point, it spilled to the Federal University, Wukari campus, where two students and a non-academic staff were killed. This led to the closure of the university campus. Several houses and other valuables have been destroyed.

Take this: Last November, a Catholic Priest, Rev. Fr. David Tanko, who left his church in Amadu to see his fellow clergyman in Takum, was killed and set ablaze inside his car. A witness said he was roasted like a sacrifice meant for some gods.

Rev. Fr. Cyrachus Kamai, a parish priest in Jalingo, lamented: “In times of war, you don’t kill pastors and imams, because, if you kill them, who will pray for you and for peace to return?”

### **Cause of crises**

How did Jukun and Tiv get to this ugly pass? Put differently, what is the cause of the protracted feud?

Jukun and other ethnic groups in Southern Taraba are accusing the Tiv of causing the crisis in southern Taraba as part of their expansionist agenda.

Fidelis Agabus said: “There’s a familiar trend in the attitude of the Tiv in the on-going crisis between them and the Jukun in southern Taraba. They cry out the loudest even when they are the ones doing the attacks and inflicting the injury on the Jukun.

“This same attitude is again being re-enacted in their attacks on Jukun communities in Donga Local Government Area a few days ago. They have activated their propaganda machine to alter the narrative against the Jukun. But the truth they have always failed to acknowledge is that nobody believes them.

“And it’s unfortunate that a Tiv man and special adviser in the present administration has joined those fueling this propaganda and pretending at the same that he wants peace to reign. He must realise that peace cannot thrive on falsehood. He should summon the courage to tell his Tiv kinsmen to stop attacking the Jukun.

“For those who do not yet know, the recent attacks and killings in Donga communities were part of series of unprovoked acts of aggression by the Tiv against the Jukun.

All lovers of peace must prevail on the Tiv to stop the attacks and the killings.”

Another stakeholder, Mathew, disclosed: “The Tiv just launched unprovoked attacks. They just want attention for the demands they have been making to be met. One of them is that a traditional ruler of Tiv extraction appointed for them.

“The Jukun say they can’t have a traditional ruler in a land that is not theirs because traditional authority is rooted in the tradition of the people.

They always have a position of a commissioner reserved for them in the state exco. They get many other political appointments.

“They also want the Jukun to vacate all the communities with their presence and those communities declared as theirs. The government has not obliged them because it amounts to ceding land to them.

“Over the years, they have grown in population and so the need more land. This expansionist tendency is taking them to lands that belong to the Jukun. The Jukun are resisting this.”

But the question being asked is, if a chiefdom is created in Wukari and a Tiv person is not crowned a paramount ruler or First class chief, will he be answerable to the Aku-Uka in Taraba or the Tor Tiv in Benue?

But having stayed for so long in the area, Tiv are arguing that their “settlers” status ought to be repelled, claiming both land ownership and political rights in the area.

### **Ishaku committed to peace**

Investigation revealed that since he got into office, Governor Darius Dickson Ishaku has made efforts to restore peace to the troubled part of the state. In fact, it is his position that without peace, there cannot be prosperity and robust physical infrastructure.

For instance, at a peace meeting held at the Shehu Musa Yar’Adua Centre, Abuja, Governor Samuel Ortom of Benue State proposed that the Federal Government should set up a commission of enquiry into the crisis but Ishaku strongly objected to the idea of bringing ‘strangers’ into the matter. He reportedly said: “The problem is ours; it’s an internal problem. We shall look into it and resolve it.”

Thereafter, Ishaku set up a peace committee to examine and bring to an end all issues underlying persistent violent clashes between the warring groups. The committee has 15 representatives each from Tiv and Jukun communities drawn from the affected areas, including Donga, Wukari and Takum.

However, Mr. Bala Dan Abu, an aide to Governor Ishaku, is disappointed that a certain propaganda group claiming to represent the Tiv in Taraba State held a media briefing in Abuja where it accused the governor of encouraging the fighting between Tiv and Jukun in order to send the Tiv out the state.

He said: “This attempt to blackmail Gov Ishaku certainly cannot stand. Most Tarabans, including the Tiv in the state haven’t forgotten that Ishaku, on assumption of office, ordered that all Tiv people who had fled their communities and taken refuge elsewhere in the state or outside the state as a result of the crisis in Southern Taraba before then, to return. And they did.

“How then can the same man be accused of executing an agenda to send the Tiv out of Taraba State? The Ishaku administration remains committed to its promise to promote peace between the Tiv and Jukun. Those who know him well are certain that he cannot do otherwise.

“Various groups made up of eminent Jukun and Tiv persons are working behind the scene even at the moment, to end the conflict and pave the way for lasting peace in Southern Taraba.

This is no time, therefore, to make reckless accusations against the governor or any of the other people making huge sacrifices in order for peace to reign.”

Abu added that “what the government needs at this crucial time is the cooperation and support of people from both sides of the divide to ensure the success of the on-going peace efforts.”

#### Tiv reacts

Reacting to the accusations against Tiv, President Tiv cultural Association in the state, Goodman Dahida, said it is very unfortunate that Tiv people are always linked to any killing that happen in southern Taraba. According to him, it could be a case of giving a dog a bad name to hang it.

He said: “Let everyone open his eyes in southern Taraba because there could be some people behind the killings in order to prolong the crisis.”