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Death Toll in Jos Riot Rises to 350

•Armed men arrested

From Chuks Okocha in Abuja, Ruben Buhari in Kaduna and Seriki Adinoyi in Jos, 11.30.2008

The Plateau State Government has ordered security operatives comprising men of the Nigerian Army, Air Force, and Mobile Police to 'shoot on sight' anybody fomenting crisis or defying the curfew order imposed on the state capital, Jos. The order was the government's latest response to end the riot in Jos, which death toll, as at yesterday evening, had risen to 350.

Giving the order yesterday morning following fresh killings that started at the Tinna Junction and Mando areas of the city, the state Governor, Da Jonah Jang, said the state government would not sit back and watch thugs wreck more havoc on innocent citizens.

THISDAY also gathered that security operatives yesterday intercepted about 500 men armed with weapons on their way to Jos. THISDAY could not however independently verify the figure.

The arrest was a sign that the warring groups are regrouping. Jang also said his action was informed by his on-the-spot assessment of the situation, particularly in the affected areas.

He lamented that having gone round the city to ascertain the extent of damage, the loss of lives and property and the gory sights of destruction that trailed the city, he had no alternative than to give the order. The Governor however, appealed for calm saying "government is on top of the situation".

Addressing journalists at the Press Centre in Jos, officials of the Nigerian Red Cross Society said the society had deposited 150 corpses of victims of the riot at the Central Mosque.

However, unconfirmed reports say the death toll had risen beyond the figure given by the Society.

Agence France Press (AFP) reports that 381 bodies were yesterday placed in a mosque in Jos.

The Associated Press (AP) also reported that bodies with fresh wounds arrived at the city's main mosque for quick burial in keeping with Islamic precepts.

Many Christians have also lost their lives as what started as post-election violence takes a religious colouration.

Citizens who had fled their homes are taking refuge in National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA) command, Recos, NDLEA Regional Academy Central Mosque, Macalashi Juma, ECWA Church, Apata, University of Jos Senior Staff Quarters, and Rukuba Army Barracks.

The Director of Press to the Governor, James Mannok said over 500 rioters have been arrested with weapons and stolen items. He said they are being quizzed by the Police. He said more security personnel have been deployed from neighbouring states, including the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) to bring the situation under control.

THISDAY also gathered after going round the city yesterday that the level of damage to lives and properties is enormous. Thousands of new cars at various car-stands, and many houses along Zaria road were razed. Churches and Mosques were also torched in Chobe Junction. Also, corpses were being evacuated from the streets by members of the Red-cross, and the Police. A few corpses still litter the streets in Katako area of the city.

Residents living in hot spots like Bauchi road, Ali Kazaure, Recos, Angwara and Gengere were ordered by the state government to remain indoors 24 hrs, while those in other parts of Jos and Bukuru are to comply with the dusk to dawn curfew.

The fresh outbreak of crisis followed the declaration of election results which gave victory to the ruling Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) in the entire 17 local government areas.

Reacting to the crisis, the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) in a press briefing denied the report that it was its group that started the attack.

The state's CAN chairman, Most Rev. Ignatius Kaigama said "We were taken aback by the turn of events in Jos. We thought it was political, but from all indications it is not so. We were surprised at the way some of our churches and property were attacked and some of our faithful and Clergy killed. The attacks were carefully planned and executed. The questions that bog our minds are why were churches and Clergy attacked and killed? Why were politicians and political party offices not attacked if it were a political conflict? Why were the business premises and property of innocent civilians destroyed? We strongly feel that it was not political, but pre-meditated act under the guise of elections".

Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) also appealed for restraint to all inhabitants of Jos, the Plateau state capital, over the recent crisis that engulfed parts of the city.

Making the appeal in Kaduna, CAN's National General Secretary, Engr. Samuel Salifu who spoke to reporters said the association is deeply worried over the local government crisis which he said has been turned into a religious crisis by certain groups and individuals.

Salifu said: "CAN is sick and tired of these type of repetitive crises that keep happening in Jos, Bauchi, Kano, Maiduguri, Zangon Kataf, Kaduna and host of other places in Nigeria with attendant loss of lives and properties. We are calling on all the people of the state to be calm and also calling on the state government to promptly put a stop to the killings and burning and find a way of addressing future issues before they degenerate into killings."

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He also accused government and politicians of always being responsible for most crises in the country by saying that when certain state governments and politicians fail to have their way or want to get cheap popularity, they resort to playing the religious card which most often results into crises.

Also reacting to the fresh crises, some citizens blamed the government, and Plateau Independent Electoral Commission (PLASIEC) for announcing the results of the election at the height of the crisis. They noted that the commission should have allowed the situation to calm down a little.

Also, a non-governmental organisation, Human Right Writers Association (HURIWA), yesterday blamed the Jos riots, on the failure of security intelligence by all relevant security agencies in the country. The group also canvassed that severe punitive measures be meted out to the masterminds of the violence to serve as effective deterrence while the police commissioner in state and the state Director of the State Security Service (SSS) be sacked for alleged dereliction of duties.

In its own reaction to the crisis, the All Nigeria Peoples Party (ANPP) faction led by Major-General Muhammadu Buhari (rtd) has called for the declaration of emergency rule in the state over the raging crisis, while also blaming the incident on Jang who it said was desperate to win the Jos North Local Government election at all cost.

Also, the Action Congress (AC) has called for the cancellation of the Plateau council polls, since the perceived rigging of the elections is the main cause of the violence that has now left over 300 people dead and hundreds wounded or displaced in the Jos North local government area. In an interview with THISDAY in Abuja, the Secretary of ANPP Presidential Council, Engr. Buba Galadima called for the declaration of emergency rule in the state over the continued killing and maiming of people by thugs perceived to be armed by the state government.

According to Buba Galadima, "we feel bad that election ANPP won has been denied it again.. It was denied because the national secretariat of the party has been compromised and its members are therefore left without any sense of direction."

"In view of the continued killing, we call on the federal government to declare a state of emergency in the state before it is too late. Military men should be drafted to the state to dislodge those in uniform allegedly armed by the state government. We equally call for the cancellation of the result of the council election since cancel election was the main issue."

Buba Galadima said that information received by the Buhari Organisation shows that the biggest Motor Company in Jos, named Femma Motors was burned down with over 100 vehicles parked at the garage. Also the auto shop of Ibrahim Saleh Hassan, son of Alhaji Saleh Hassan, former national chairman of the Democratic Party of Nigeria (DPN) was burned down.

The Buhari group also called on government to set up an independent Judiciary Enquiry Panel to investigate the cause of the crisis.

Also in a statement issued in Abuja Saturday by its National Publicity Secretary, the Action Congress (AC) Alhaji Lai Mohammed, the party also condemned the government's gross insensitivity in going ahead to release the results of the elections, especially that of the Jos North that precipitated the crisis, even as the smoke was yet to clear from the ruins of the violence.

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