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Another Religious Riot Claims 38 Lives in Bauchi

From Segun Awofadeji in Bauchi and Yemi Akinsuyi in Abuja, 12.29.2009

Another religious crisis erupted in Bauchi State in the early hours of yesterday, leaving 38 persons dead, including a soldier and four children. A number of houses were torched with many people sustaining various degrees of injuries in the incident that caught the residents of the Bauchi metropolis unawares. Hell was let loose in the early hours of the day when an religious sect known as **kala-kato** believed to be an offshoot of the notorious Maitatsine went on the rampage in Zango, a suburb of Bauchi metropolis, demanding the release of its leader claimed to have been arrested by the authorities.

The leader of the group, simply identified as Mallam Badamasi, has been confirmed killed by police authorities. Also killed, according to unconfirmed reports, was a soldier from the 33 Field Artillery Brigade, Bauchi, who was drafted to the troubled area alongside other security operatives while the four children were burnt when their parents' house was set ablaze by the rampaging members of the sect who are mainly children between the ages 10 and 15, backed by adult members of the sect. One of the neighbours of the sect said they sensed trouble early morning when the preacher of the sect embarked on a sermon insulting other Muslim sects, calling them infidels as long as they do not belong to their own sect, Kala-kato.

According to Kamal Adamu, a resident of the area who spoke to newsmen in Hausa: **live at the Zango main road but this street is called Saidawa. I was at the open preaching of the sect yesterday night (Sunday) and this morning (Monday) when the preacher questioned the rationale behind the killing of the dreaded Boko Haram members when all the sect was preaching against is reality. He added that one of the listeners challenged the preacher "and he was dealt with there and then", while another who called on the people to leave the place of the preaching was killed instantly. "Before we knew what was happening, the sect members had taken to the streets burning down people's houses and maiming others.**

It is very unfortunate happening again in Bauchi, he said. When contacted, the Bauchi State Police Command PPRO, Malam Mohammed Barau, confirmed the incident, saying that as soon as the command got security reports, it deployed a combine team of regular policemen and riot policemen to the area to maintain law and order, adding that as at the time of this report the command was still awaiting situation report from those on the field. The PPRO however said that the Police Commissioner, Atiku Yusuf Kafur, was not ready to comment as he was awaiting directives from the Police Headquarters in Abuja.

This is the third religious crisis in the state this year, coming after the Boko Haram crisis which led to the deaths of thousands in Northern Nigeria. Meanwhile, the riot has died down, according to the police. Speaking in his office yesterday on the situation at one of the most troubled northern states, Force Public Relations Officer (FPRO), Mr. Emmanuel Ojukwu, said normalcy had since returned to the state capital. Although the FPRO did not give the number of casualties, the police image maker said more riot policemen had been drafted to the city and its environs to forestall peace and security.

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