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### **Commission: JTF, Boko Haram Committed Atrocities in Baga**

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Chief of Army Staff (COAS), Lt-Gen. Azubuike Ihejirika

- 50 insurgents killed in Borno

By Tobi Soniyi, Senator Iroegbu and Michael Olugbode

The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) has found evidence of atrocities allegedly committed by men of the Joint Task Force (JTF) and Boko Haram in Baga, Borno State.

In an interim assessment report on the Baga incident of April 16 and the situation in North-east, the commission warned that a humanitarian crisis loomed in the area because it was no longer safe to go out and farm in the area.

Clashes between the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) and the Islamic militant group in April had stirred a controversy following dispute over the death toll and the extent of damage after the two groups engaged in gun duels in Baga, Borno State.

While some interest groups put the death toll at 187, the MNJTF Commander, Brig-Gen. Austin Edokpayi's account showed that 37 people, comprising 30 Boko Haram members, one soldier and six civilians died.

A report by the Human Rights Watch (HRW), released in May in Johannesburg, South Africa, said its investigations showed that 183 people were killed, adding that its analysis of satellite images of Baga, before and after the clash, showed that 2,275 buildings, majority of which were likely residences, were razed by fire with another 125 severely damaged.

Also, the Senate in a report last week described the casualty figures bandied around during incident as exaggerated.

However, the NHRC in its interim report, a copy of which was obtained at the weekend, established the fact that members of the Boko Haram sect carried out multi-faceted attacks on law enforcement agents and service personnel.

The report came just as the military announced Sunday that it had killed 50 insurgents in Borno during a gunfight at the weekend.

The report said: "In addition to systematic attacks on law enforcement and internal security assets, JALISWAJ (Boko Haram) is also credibly alleged to have attacked communities, churches and places of worship.

"Victims reported the shooting of family members by young men who spoke the local Kanuri language. In many communities, women were reportedly prevented from going to the farms to undertake planting. Some who ventured were attacked or abducted."

The commission said it found incidents of forced marriage perpetrated by members of the sect and spoke with witnesses whose family members were abducted and forced into marriage.

On the part of the JTF, the commission added that it received several credibly attested allegations of gross violations by officials of the JTF, including allegations of summary executions, torture, arbitrary detention amounting to internment and outrages against the dignity of civilians, as well as rape.

The report said: "In particular, we have received persistent and credibly attested allegations of indiscriminate disposal of dead human remains by personnel of both JTF and the Borno State Environmental Protection Agency (BOSEPA)."

The report also stated that JTF allegedly detained people indiscriminately and in violation of constitutionally guaranteed rights.

"Detainees are allegedly held in un-gazetted places of detention, with no or inadequate documentation and outside the safeguards provided for under applicable laws, including the Constitution of Nigeria and the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights.

"They are not allowed access to family, counsel or medical personnel," it added.

It explained that most of the allegations against JTF related to the question of proportionality of the use of force as well as the standards applicable to the conduct of the armed forces in internal

security operations.

Nevertheless, the commission urged the authorities to regularly undertake rotation and renewal of the troops deployed in the North-east to allow the troops have enough rest and recuperation.

The report also noted that the farming communities of Borno State had lost the 2013 planting season due to fear of Boko Haram attacks.

“The consequences of this are far-reaching. The immediate result is the likelihood of a food security and nutritional crises in Borno and surrounding states that are dependent on the agricultural output from its Lake Chad Basin,” the report added.

It called on the federal government to urgently deploy mitigation mechanism in order to avert a food crisis in the area.

Already, the commission has established that the prices of foodstuffs had gone up in many parts of the North-east.

It also noted that since the introduction of a state of emergency in Borno, Adamawa and Yola States, there had been a notable de-escalation in Boko Haram activities in the affected states, particularly in Borno.

Notwithstanding the reduction in terrorist attacks in Borno State, about 50 suspected members of the outlawed sect were said to have been killed during a confrontation at the weekend with the men of the JTF in Borno, Operation Restore Order.

The suspects were killed at Zabarmari ward, an outskirt of the troubled town of Maiduguri metropolis.

Zabarmari ward, a military source said, has been one of the identified enclaves of the Islamist sect.

In another incident, members of Vigilance Youths Group, aka “Civilian JTF” on Saturday at the Borno Express Motor Park, arrested three Boko Haram suspects. They were intercepted while trying to travel to Jigawa State to launch attacks.

A top military officer told journalists that acting on intelligence report, the task force moved to stop the terrorists before they could launch a coordinated attack on Zabaramari ward in Jere Local Government Area, a few kilometres from Maiduguri.

The source said: “We received an intelligence report that several members of Boko Haram have regrouped and were residing and hiding in this ward. We mobilised our troops to the area, and on reaching the place, the suspects upon noticing our presence, began to chant: ‘Allahu Akbar,’ (God is Great) and started shooting sporadically at us. We therefore had no option than to repel the attackers; we succeeded in shooting dead 10 terrorists.

“We decided not to take away any of their corpses as we left them in the area; but the following day, when we mobilised our men to the area, we found out that hundreds of the terrorists were at one of the graveyards burying their dead ones; and when we approached, some of them started shooting at our troops, which led to the exchange of gun fire for half an hour, that led to the killing of 40 of them.”

He told reporters in Maiduguri that as at yesterday, troops were still in Zabarmari hunting for suspected terrorists.

On the arrested Boko Haram suspects embarking on a journey to Dutse,

Jigawa State, the JTF source said: “The men of the JTF are highly delighted with the zeal/effort being put in by the vigilante youth popularly called Civilian JTF. They were yesterday (Saturday) able to arrest three Boko Haram suspects at the Borno Express Motor Park.

“They later handed them over to the JTF local commander. But one of them is now dead. The terrorists are from Bama Local Government Area and they were going on a deadly mission to Jigawa and other states in the north. In fact, the deceased before his death told us that already all their weapons of massive destruction had been transported to the targeted areas; waiting for their arrival.”

Meanwhile, the Chief of Army Staff (COAS), Lt-Gen. Azubuike Ihejirika, has expressed delight that the unwholesome activities of Boko Haram and other insurgent groups have helped to boost military innovation, invention and overall transformation of the army into a force better prepared to meet the contemporary security challenges.

He stated this Sunday at an interdenominational church service in Abuja, which is part of activities marking the Nigerian Army Day Celebration (NADCEL), 2013.

He said as part of the innovation, the army has come up with mobile kitchens to be exhibited during the celebration, which would enable them serve troops adequately and promptly.

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