

Rivers of Blood!

March 13, 2016



The security agencies should move in urgently as the nation can ill-afford another bloodbath in Rivers State

Widespread violence and killings are once again on the rise in Rivers State. The killing of Franklyn Obi highlights the agonising quandary for the state. Some criminals recently invaded the home of the All Peoples Congress (APC) Ward 4 Chairman in Ogba/Egbema in Ndoni local council and murdered him, his wife and son. Thereafter, they left with the

severed head of the politician. No reasons were given for the brutal act.

The murder of Ofinijite Amachree, another APC chieftain shortly after, was a continuation of that gory ritual. Amachree was killed and his body reportedly set ablaze in Buguma, Akoku Toru local council. "In the last two weeks, over 30 APC members have been killed in different parts of Rivers State," lamented Dr. Dakuku Peterside, the APC governorship candidate in the last election. "We are tired of this bloodbath."

But the violence is all embracing. The Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), the ruling party in the state, is also counting its losses. Its chairman in Obite, one Isaac Chinedu, and another party colleague named Chinedu Saidey, were reportedly killed same day. And then there are reports of some political actors being buried alive by a militant leader.

Since all the killings are coming ahead of the rerun legislative (national and state) elections in the state scheduled for the coming weekend, it is safe to conclude that they are politically motivated. But the worry really is that the security agencies do not seem to be on top of the situation. Frantic appeals for calm made by the state governor, Mr. Nyesom Wike, seemed unheeded. We therefore call on the relevant authorities to move in quickly not only to arrest the drift but also to apprehend those who are disturbing the peace of the state and bring them to book.

Incidentally, what is happening in Rivers State was a replay of the orchestrated regime of violence in the build-up to last year's general elections. Even though the elections were relatively peaceful across the country, the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) reckoned that about 100 people were killed in the state. Unfortunately, there were no reports that anybody was ever punished for such crimes; and perhaps the reason for the prevailing culture of impunity.

But we are concerned that some people could resort to killing in the name of politics, especially when there is really no evidence that the interest of the downtrodden (often used as cannon fodder in this violence) is being served.

What is particularly worrying is that this "end justifies the means" approach that defines political engagement in Rivers State today has over the years provided the incentive and motivation for politicians and power seekers to believe that all is fair and acceptable,

including cold-blooded murder of their opponents. Yet the sad irony of all these killings is that up to date the police have not successfully prosecuted and brought conviction against any of those suspected to be involved.

There is no doubt that it is this failure of the authorities that has directly encouraged further commission of such crimes. It is also very clear that with eyes to the enormous spoils of office attached to the nation's political positions from the presidency to local councillorship, many of our politicians would do anything in order to ensure easy ride at the polls.

As we have canvassed in the past, there is need for a review of the remunerations and other perks of public office holders in our country. Perhaps we will begin to see a reduction in politically motivated killings if and when the fat allowances attached to the elective offices are slashed considerably. When people realise that public office is no longer an avenue to "share the booty" but to render service, the tendency to seek election at all costs will be minimised.

However, since Rivers State has become a classic case of how quickly order can yield place to anarchy, it is time for the relevant authorities to move in. A time was when the state was peaceful and was rendered unattractive for cultists, militants and hoodlums. Now, these criminal elements are being armed and mobilised to serve political ends. We call on all the stakeholders to work towards restoring peace and security in the state. And such efforts must begin immediately such that this weekend's election does not bring with it another harvest of deaths.

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