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## 200 killed in Bauchi religious crisis - Govt imposes curfew - Allah has fought for us - Yuguda

From Ishola Michael, Tayo Ogunleye Gbola Subair and Chris Agbambu - 27.07.2009

NO fewer than 200 Islamic fundamentalists, popularly called 'Boko Haram', were believed to have been killed while many others were seriously injured in the early hours of Sunday, following a renewed religious crisis around the Federal Low-cost Housing Estate in the Bauchi metropolis, just as a yet to be identified soldier was killed by the fundamentalists during an exchange of fire.

Nigerian Tribune investigations revealed that the Islamic sect, which was said to have been campaigning against anything Western, claimed that its adherents were not allowed by the Bauchi government to publicly practise their religion as well as win more souls to the sect.

Reports had it that members of the sect had been planning a demonstration in Bauchi for a long time but were not given the chance because of the fear by government that their doctrine, if allowed to be preached publicly, would cause religious crisis, considering the fact that the teachings were completely contrary to those of other Islamic sects as regards peaceful coexistence.

The reports further revealed that the sect members in their hundreds trooped to the Dutsen Tanshi police station in the early hours of the day and attacked it. They destroyed everything they could lay their hands on but could not break into the armoury.

After a distress call by the policemen to the command headquarters, reinforcement of armed policemen, including Mobile policemen, were drafted to disperse the Islamic fundamentalists, during which some of them were felled by the police bullets while many of them were seriously injured.

The Bauchi State police command through the Police Public Relations Officer (PPRO), Mohammed Barau, confirmed the crisis, saying that more policemen had been deployed in the area to secure life and property, adding that other security measures had been taken to ensure that the crisis did not spread beyond the area.

He said that as soon as the state command got clearance from the police headquarters in Abuja it would officially make a pronouncement on the crisis.

As of the time of this report, a joint military and police team had gone round the villages in Bauchi to fish out some of the fundamentalists, who had escaped from their base in Bauchi, which was completely pulled down by the security operatives, and believed to be hiding in the surrounding hills. Several hundreds of them had been arrested and are being detained at the police command headquarters.

In his reaction to the development, Minister of Police Affairs, Ibrahim Yakubu Lame, declared that the IGP had been ordered to ensure peace and security of life and property of innocent citizens across the country, emphasising that inasmuch as government was committed to freedom of religion, it would not condone fundamentalism or allow any person under the guise of religion to cause mayhem in the country.

Though the Director of Press Affairs to the Governor, Mohammed Maigari Khanna, and other top government functionaries were seen at the police command headquarters, they declined to make any comment on the development but promised that as soon as the situation was properly studied, government would make its position public.

The Bauchi State government has imposed curfew beginning from 9:00p.m. to 6:00a.m. indefinitely in the state. Meanwhile, the tension in the state has been doused just as the people of the state are jubilating, expressing joy that the government has been proactive in stemming the crisis.

Bauchi State police spokesman, Mohammed Barau, said the armed gang belonged to Boko Haram, a local group that wants sharia (Islamic law) to be imposed on Nigeria.

"The situation is now under control. More members of the organisation are being arrested," Barau said. A member of the gang, who was wounded during the initial attack on the police station, told Reuters the group wanted to "clean the (Nigerian) system which is polluted by Western education and uphold sharia all over the country."

Bauchi is one of 12 states in the predominately Muslim north that started a stricter enforcement of sharia in 2000 — a decision that alienated sizable Christian minorities and sparked sectarian violence that killed thousands.

More than 200 ethnic groups generally live peacefully side by side in the West African country, although civil war left one million people dead between 1967 and 1970 and there have been

bouts of religious unrest since then.

Force spokesman, ACP Emmanuel Ojukwu, who spoke to the Nigerian Tribune in Abuja, on Sunday, said that the police fought the fundamentalists to a standstill and overpowered them, while over 100 of them were arrested.

He said that the group of fundamentalists attacked the military for reasons yet unknown. According to him, there were casualties, and over 100 of them were arrested.

Ojukwu disclosed that one AK47, 200 live ammunition, bows and arrows, dane guns, explosives and other dangerous weapons were recovered from them.

Bauchi State governor, Mallam Isa Yuguda, has described the smashing of the notorious Islamic sect as the best thing to happen in the efforts for a long-lasting peace in the state just as he called on his colleagues across the country to take similar security steps in order to cleanse the country of militancy of whatever form.

A visibly elated Yuguda, while reacting to the development, said that, "today, we are celebrating that we have been able to see the end of the problem. Now I have been vindicated because I have always said that what was happening in Bauchi was not religious but militancy, as it is happening all over the country but we thank Allah that everybody has now seen that we are right."

The governor added that, "we pre-empted them right and we struck at the right time, that was why we were able to get them. If they had pre-empted us and struck first, it would have been disastrous for all of us as nobody would be able to sleep, not to talk of being in peace at out respective homes because the security report we heard was that they would bomb the entire town and set it on fire. We thank Allah for what He has done for us in Bauchi, as all those who said we had religious crisis have now seen that the situation is that of militancy as is the case all over the country."

Governor Yuguda then commended all the security operatives who took part in the operation, saying that it was a perfect operation which brought out the best in them, calling them to keep up the good work and ensure the security of lives and properties of all innocent citizens of the state.