

Boko Haram strikes again, kills 28, injures several others

●Army deploys bomb experts in North

●Cordons off Abuja, other cities

BY KINGSLEY
OMONOBİ & INNO-
CENT ANABA

M AIDUGURI— ISLAMIC sect, Boko Haram, yesterday ignored the presence of Joint Task Force deployed to Maiduguri to contain them, went on a fresh killing spree, killing 28 people and injuring several others within 24 hours.

On Sunday night, the sect tossed bombs on a crowded beer garden in Maiduguri, Borno State capital killing at least 25 people, and struck again hours after attacking the customs area of Maiduguri where members of the Joint Task Force maintains a secretariat.

The commander of the task force on Boko Haram, Maj. Gen. Jack Okechukwu Nwaogbo, who confirmed the attack which included bomb blasts and gunfire said 3 people were killed while at least two customs officials were wounded

On Sunday night, suspected Boko Haram members riding on motorcycles attacked three different makeshift bars in the city

Witnesses said at least 25 died in the beer parlour attacks, while Nwaogbo declined to offer a casualty information yesterday during a news conference.

According to the commander, "what caused the killings of many people in the attacks were when about 10 gunmen riding seven motorcycles surrounded and took strategic positions at the beer sheds and shops and started firing at the people with their Kalashnikov rifles, before setting ablaze the entire makeshift shacks."

2 nabbed with explosives in church

While no arrests have been made over the beer parlour attacks, he said police arrested two men carrying explosives at a church in the city. He said they had pretended they wanted to convert from Islam.

A military officer said security had been scaled up in the city following the attack.

"The JTF (Joint Task Force) began operations in Maiduguri yesterday with the deployment of more troops into the city, including 500 navy personnel," said a senior military officer who asked not to be named as he does not have clearance to speak to journalists.

The unit "is now in charge of security in the city and the responsibility of combating the spate of attacks in the metropolis is in its hands," the officer added.

Army deploys bomb experts

Meanwhile, the Nigerian Army has commenced the deployment of more of its bomb detection and detonation experts, to the North West, North East and North Central zones of the country even as it seeks more funding to upgrade and activate more bomb detonation units in other zones of the country.

Already, the bomb detection and detonation units of the Nigerian Army is well deployed in the Niger Delta area occasioned by years of militant activities which was tackled for years by the Joint Task Force code named *Operation Restore Hope*. However, other zones of the country like the South West, South East and the North, except

Abuja, have not been factored into the areas where professionalism of bomb experts would be needed.

Confirming the development in Abuja yesterday at the Army's 2nd quarterly conference, Chief of Army Staff, Lt. General Onyeabor Azubuike Ihejirika, said in addition to the deployment of bomb experts, the army was putting in place new security measures across major cities in the country aimed at curtailing the Boko Haram menace and tactics.

His words: "The Boko Haram menace and the tactics they employ are relatively new to security agencies. Part of this quarterly conference is to review these tactics and come out with answers that are implementable, as drastic challenges call for drastic solutions. The measures in place in the FCT are not limited to Abuja alone but nationwide.

Army's role in 2011 general elections

On the 2011 general elections, the Army chief said the performance of the army in the overall security operation for the elections was part of the agenda for the conference, saying: "We will review the Nigerian Army performance in the just concluded elections. We will draw lessons from the shortcoming and other challenges we faced during the elections and from these lessons, we will prepare better for future elections.

Army cordons off Abuja

In compliance with the revelation of the Army chief

weekend, that there will be increased presence of army personnel in the FCT and other cities following the upsurge in Boko Haram bombings, Abuja was yesterday cordoned off by army personnel made up of special forces and bomb detection and detonation personnel making movement in and around the city very hectic and cumbersome.

Travellers coming into and exiting Abuja, in particular, were subjected to heavy security checks and scrutiny with those coming into the FCT from Bauchi, Plateau and Nasarawa states through Mararaba subjected to stop and search while the same applied at the Zuba entry point where those coming to the FCT from Niger, Kaduna, Kano and Katsina states were subjected to thorough screening. Gwagwalada and Giri axis was the venue of heavy screening of those coming into the FCT from Kogi, Kwara and the Niger Delta states.

These killings are senseless

—Amnesty International

In a related development, Amnesty International, has called on the Boko Haram sect to stop attacks on civilians.

Amnesty International's Deputy Director for Africa, Tawanda Hondora, in a statement, yesterday, said: "These killings are senseless and outrageous. Direct attacks on civilians are prohibited under international law and show a complete disregard for the right to life. Boko Haram must stop its reign of terror in the country. No cause can justify the deliberate targeting of civilians."