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## Fatal error: How over 100 died as Air Force bombs IDP camp

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By Ndahi Marama &amp; Levinus Nwabughio

Buhari pleads for calm, says it's a "regrettable operational mistake"

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It's saddening, says Air Force; Saraki, Dogara regret incident

Gov Shettima orders emergency medical response; lauds MSF

MAIDUGURI—JUST as the nation generally, and Borno State in particular was about coming to terms with the suicide bomb attack at the University of Maiduguri, tragedy struck again in Borno State,yesterday. No fewer than 100 innocent civilians were killed in a mistaken air strike by men of the Nigerian Air Force of ‘Operation Lafiya Dole’ in the North–East, in a coordinated attack on a supposed group of terrorists gathering in Kala Balge Local Government Area of the state.

Sources said the air strike was carried out on one of the Internally Displaced Persons, IDPs, camps in Rann, the headquarters of Kala Balge council, in which civilians were killed, while two soldiers, staff of International Committee of Red Cross, ICRC and Medicine San Frontiers (Doctors without Borders) were critically wounded.

A close government source, who did not want his name mentioned said, “more than 100 innocent civilians were killed in the incident.”

The Nigerian Air Force was said to be carrying out mop-up operations against the insurgents in the North–East when the incident happened.

Meanwhile, President Muhammadu Buhari has pledged that the Federal Government will help the state government in attending to the victims of the accidental bombing. The President who received the news with deep sadness and regrets, described it as regrettable and pleaded for calm. He condoled with the families of the dead, wishing the wounded divine succour and full recovery even as he sympathized with the Borno State Government.



Some victims of the error bomb attack at an IDP camp in Borno State, yesterday. Photo: AFP.

He prayed God to grant repose to the souls of the dead of “this regrettable operational mistake.”

Confirming the incident at a news [conference](#) held at the Theatre [Command](#) Headquarters of **Operation Lafiya Dole** yesterday, Major-General Lucky Irabor said upon receiving an intelligence report that some Boko Haram elements were regrouping in Kala Balge Local Government Area of Borno State, he quickly ordered men of the Air Force to address the problem.

He regretted that the strike was conducted in the area, unfortunately locals and other civilians were killed alongside remnants of insurgents, who were regrouping.

“This morning (yesterday), we received reports about gathering of Boko Haram terrorists somewhere in Kala Balge Local Government area of Borno State. We got a coordinate and I directed that the air should go to address the problem.

“Unfortunately, the strike was conducted but it turned out that the locals somewhere in Rann were affected.

“We are yet to get the details of the casualties. But we heard that some civilians were killed, others were wounded and we also have two of our soldiers that were also wounded. Among some that were wounded were local staff of the Medecines Sans Frontiers (Doctors Without Borders) as well as ICRC,” Irabor said.

Kala Balge is east and about 180 kilometres drive from Maiduguri, the state capital.

Also confirming the incident, military spokesperson, Brigadier-General Rabe Abubakar confirmed the incident but explained that it was an error that the military deeply regrets.

He explained that soldiers got information of movement of Boko Haram members and deployed ground troops and air cover to tackle the terrorists.

It was the air support that mistakenly dropped the bomb, he said.

It was further learned that the state government has already ordered all hospitals in Maiduguri to be prepared to receive and promptly treat the injured. Also, an International Red Cross, ICRC, helicopter has been deployed to the camp to evacuate the wounded to the various hospitals.

### **Governor Shettima orders emergency medical response**

Following the unfortunate incident, Governor Kashim Shettima has ordered the state Ministry of Health to set up emergency units in all medical hospitals under the state government located in Maiduguri with the state Specialist Hospital, the Professor Umaru Shehu Hospital and General Muhammad Shuwa memorial hospital, all placed on standby in readiness to carry out emergency treatment.

This handout image received courtesy of Doctors Without Border (MSF) on January 17, 2017, shows wounded people lying on the ground after an air force jet accidentally bombarded a camp for those displaced by Boko Haram Islamists, in Rann, northeast Nigeria./ AFP PHOTO

[See more photos of accidentally air strike in Borno](#)

The governor's spokesman, Isa Gusau, said in a statement yesterday that Governor Shettima received the news with very deep concern while he has channelled his focus on ensuring that all the victims, particularly those with severe injuries are provided urgent medical treatment.

"As at this evening (yesterday), the International Committee of the Red Cross and Red Crescent has deployed a helicopter which is on ground at Rann to begin evacuation of victims, starting with those with the most critical health [conditions](#). The MSF (Medecines Sans Frontieres — Doctors Without Borders) along with

officials of the state government have been first responders. Governor Shettima commends MSF for its rapid response in providing first aid treatment to victims at [the scene](#).

“While Shettima is working to ensure that all victims are evacuated as soon as possible, the state Commissioner of Health has mobilized medical doctors, nurses, lab technicians, pharmacists and other health officials in all hospitals owned by Borno State Government, while ambulances have also been deployed. The medical experts are currently on standby with emergency [consumables](#) set for treatment of victims soon as they arrive Maiduguri.

“Casualty figures are yet to be ascertained but from information available to the governor, there are records of deaths with many persons injured. The governor’s heart is with families of all those affected and urges citizens to pray for the repose of the souls of those dead and the speedy recovery of the injured.

“Governor Shettima looks forward to formal communication from the military to ascertain what happened and will brief the media should there be the need to do so. For now, all focus should be on the evacuation of victims and the provision of emergency medical services to them with the hope that they quickly recover,” Gusau said.

### **Accidental strike saddening — Air Force**

Also, The Nigerian Air Force, in a statement by its [Director](#) of Public Relations and Information, Group Captain Ayodele Famuyiwa, expressed sadness over the incident.

Famuyiwa in a statement, yesterday, said: “NAF is saddened by today’s (yesterday) accidental air strike by its fighter jet at Rann in Kala Balge area of Borno State in which some innocent lives were lost.

“While available information is sketchy, the Theatre [Commander](#), **Operation Lafiya Dole** is taking appropriate steps to avail us with details of the incident. The loss occasioned by this unfortunate incident is deeply regretted.

“NAF commiserates with those affected and their families and would update the public as soon as detailed facts emerge from the investigation.”

### **Dogara, Saraki regret incident**

Meanwhile, Speaker of the House of Representatives, Yakubu Dogara, yesterday, regretted the incident involving IDP camp, in Borno.

Dogara in a statement by his Special Adviser on Media & Public Affairs, Turaki Hassan, condoled with the families of the victims and prayed God to comfort them. He also prayed for quick recovery for the injured, and urged the military to investigate the incident so as to prevent future occurrence.

President of the Senate, Bukola Saraki, yesterday, conveyed his deep regret over the accidental bombing of the Rann Community in Borno State.

Saraki, in a statement on his social media handles said: “My thoughts and prayers are with the families and victims of today’s accident in Rann Community of Borno State.

“I pray that the souls of the victims may rest in peace. I wish the victims speedy recovery, and I pray that incidents like these never reoccur again.”

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