

Nigeria: Boko Haram, Police Accused of Indiscriminate Arrests and Extortion

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"Boko Haram; Borno's Blind War on Violence"

On Tuesday, 9th October 2010, Governor Ali Modu Sheriff of Borno State donated 40 pick-up patrol vehicles to the visiting Chief of Army Staff, Lieutenant General Azubuike Ihejirika, which also heralded the formal inauguration of Operation Messa, which is a joint Military/Police Patrol set up to specifically combat the menacing selective killings of some citizens and related other violent urban crimes in the state.

It would be recalled that, Borno State has come under siege by some members of the "Ahlal-Sunna wal Da'awat Jihad a.k.a Boko Haram, who have held the people and state hostage, thus impeding and inhibiting freedom of movement, association, speech and even right to life and dignity of human person. The retaliatory killings being carried out by through gorilla tactic of hit-and-run by the Islamic group in Borno and Bauchi have caused serious security concerns and worries to the nation which was also part of the reason that resulted in to the changing of guards in the military high command, which culminated in the retirement of Lt. Gen. Danbazzau and his replacement with Lt. Gen. Ihejirika as Chief of the Army Staff who was given mandate to address internal security threats. Together with Maj. Gen. Idoko and Brigade Commander 12 21 Armored Division, Brig- General Nda Liman, they had visited Ali Sheriff in the Government House in continuation of the visit to the Areas of Responsibility (AOR) under them, to chalk up support for the "Internal Security" measures of the Army under the current dispensation, which was necessitated and exacerbated by the recent spate of killings and other terrorists activities and militancy generally across the nation. Although the raising insecurity in Borno and Bauchi states which culminated to the growing armed resistance against the state and selected agents of government was as a result of glaring injustice and official impunity perpetrated by the police which saw the brutal killings of the radical sect including their leader late Muhammed Yusuf and his father-in-law without taking them to court. What further infuriated the sect members is the inability of government to ensure justice by way of prosecuting all the law enforcement agents that are found culpable in the killing spree.

It should be recalled that Governor Sheriff has paid an official visit to President Jonathan Goodluck, recently, where it was reported that Sheriff had solicited support for the intensification of effort to reinforce security in the state in view of the forgoing security threats being unleashed by unknown gunmen who have been killing selected individuals in the city lately. The governor and his family members, according to credible sources, are the number- one target of the sect members. They accused Sheriff of plotting the killing of their leader, Yusuf Mohammad.

As way of curtailing the threat by the radical sect members, a reinforcement of Army personal from the Biu Barracks numbering about one thousand five hundred, with three Armored vehicles (scorpions) were released to the state to fortify it should the killings escalate to full blown "war" and confrontations, reminiscent of the July 2009 ugly episodes.

It was unfortunate to note however, that, on the day the 40 vehicles were released to the Army Chiefs in Maiduguri, the "dare devil" assailants visited the house of an inspector of police, Kashim Bukar of the C.I.D Branch in the Police Headquarters, located at Umarari ward, and killed him pronto. They made away after firing sporadic warning shots in to the air to scare off on-lookers and possible intruders. The sad event took place at about 10.00 pm, on Tuesday, 16th October 2010.

In another macabre and stranger than fiction siege and broad day assault, an unknown duo paid a visit to a popular area of the city where tyres are sold at Bama Road, near Sherifferson's Super Stores, wearing long gowns underneath which where assault rifles concealed, and later, after pretending as customers, pulled out their riffles and made everybody to lay down, and after, collected the day's sales and made away with it on a motor bike. A duo was said to have pursued them but where shot at, leading to infliction of injuries on them, and, are now hospitalized. This bizarre attack took place on Thursday, 21 October at about 3.00pm when security watch and air surveillance were going on simultaneously around Maiduguri. The police chopper on air simply did not pick the scene of the "robbery" attack. No arrests were made, neither did anybody claimed responsibility. Meanwhile, the people's worse fears continued ab initio. A resident of Borno, Malam Kachalla, told Desert Herald "when will all these gory assault end? People have been living under total fears, apprehensions and uncertainties. Businesses and social lives have been hampered; morale has become abysmally low; mental and psychological agonies and pains have increased; emotional well being of the people have been decapitated and impeded; people are at their wits ends".

In the middle of all the social hullabaloo and precariousness, a handbill was released in the town by the invisible members of the radical extremist Islamic group which calls itself Ahl-al Sunna wal Da'awat wal Jihad; purportedly signed by its runaway leader, Imam Abubakar Shekau. The message contained therein "message from Imam Shekau" written in flawless Hausa language, contained among others, that anyone who dares collects the 500,000 reward money announced by the Government , to anyone who provides vital information leading to the arrests of the "killers" of "group members" has committed shirk or apostasy for which their blood will be shade as reprisal. The bulletin message, pasted in several areas of Gwange ward, Maiduguri, warned the society from associating with the police and discussing the group in assemblies, which failure could be disastrous. The police PPRO, ASP Abdullahi, has since described the message as a "hoarse" or "sham" , describing it as "an attempt to cause unnecessary panic among the people," for which he called on them to disregard and discountenance it even though it is clear that the rampant cases of the killings have defied solution from both the police, army, and the SSS which resulted to the gross failure to apprehend the killers or to disorganize their source and contacts. It would be recalled that the transferred former Commissioner of Police, Ibrahim Abdu, has once told the press that Imam Shekau, the writer/sender of the handbill, is no more, even thou audio/visual CD plates later was released in which his image was captured reading

messages to the people, calling for reprisal attacks and Jihad, over the July 2009 extra-judicial killings of their leaders and its aftermath., where Al-Jazeera later released footages of arrested members of the group being lied down in the street corners and gunned down by the police in cold blood.

But the question the people have been asking is, at whose risks will the people ignore the recent messages by Imam Shekau, asking the people to stay clear off the police, who have since become the targets of the group?

The transfers in the police force which has claimed the former CP among others, has not helped matters either. The new CP, Abubakar Mohammed, has since ordered arrests of people indiscriminately in some areas of the city to enable him "investigate further". However, it was alleged that several innocent ones have been arrested and clamped in to police detention, either **on** trumped charges, frivolous suspicion or fabricated and doctored charges.

According to impeccable sources at Dala Alamderi ward in Bulumkotu area of Maiduguri who confided in Desert Herald under confidentiality, "several down-trodden masses have been arrested after their privacies and rights to human persons as contained in the constitution have been violated by the police."

Another source adds, "so many common people, with known records of proven integrity and sound character in such areas as Umarari, Gwange, Dada, etc were randomly besieged in their abodes, beaten up, arrested and detained without bails," even when their community heads had visited the new Police Commissioner in his office to testify to their good conducts and behaviors in their respective communities."

Desert Herald further learnt that some innocent poor citizens with proven track records of good character and conducts have been arrested unjustly and later released after huge financial amount of money had allegedly parted ways as bribes to the police.

It can be deducted that the police in Maiduguri has failed to arrest the perpetrators of the dastardly acts and have resorted to indiscriminate and unjustified mass arrests and detention, in order to instill ore fears in to the already demoralized masses. The police, according to another source, has become frustrated and disillusioned with their inability to prevent crime and **violence** and thus resorted to arresting innocent people in order to hide their shortcomings and failures. But this is not how to get to the bottom of the matter, opined a lawyer in one of the legal chambers in town. "Investigations should be predicated **on** facts not fallacies, hearsays or mere suspicions" he said, "The police must be vigilant, proactive and determined to succeed rather than be retroactive and chasing shadows. The failure of the force has been exposed by the recent secret killings and the killers who are yet to be apprehended in the act or even afterwards. The police have been caught wanting in this regard because they have failed to prevent crimes, investigate it or prosecute offenders in these regards thereby making citizens lose confidence in them."

Even though the police are targets and have cognate reasons to be apprehensive, they can use intelligence and data gathering mechanism to get vital information that could lead to the cracking down of the criminal elements within. However, it is sad and regrettable to note that they have failed in these regards, the lawyer lamented.

The Nigerian police, agreed, have archaic and outdated equipments to fight crimes; nonetheless, they need to know that they have responsibilities under the Police Act and constitution, to maintain law and order, prevent crimes and arrest/prosecute offenders and criminals, the occupational hazards notwithstanding. In an interview with this reporter, Barrister Ibrahim Jibo said, "they ought to know that every professional has one form of occupational risk or another to confront in our day-to-day activities to eke a living. They are not the only professional group to face occupational hazards in Nigeria what about the drivers, soldiers, journalists, customs, wardens, lawyers, politicians, etc? we all face occupational risks, but the job must be thoroughly done. The police should not hide under ill-equipment or ill-motivation to fail us, or the nation as we face challenges of insecurity caused by all forms of militancy and insurgencies. They have a duty to protect lives and property although society too has roles to play in these regards because security is every body's business."

He said unless security is assured, Nigerian government must allow all responsible, sane and mentally sound citizens to bear arms in order to protect themselves from possible attacks from murderers, robbers, insurgents, militants or other groups with ideological hatred and contempt to attack non-members and others that didn't share their beliefs. He lamented that Nigeria is gradually sliding down the abyss of insecurity and it is a matter of time before it becomes another banana or police state like Somalia or Chad.

In Nigeria, lawlessness, anarchy, chaos, restiveness, etc are looming daily. Certainly, these are dangerous times for Nigeria.

It should be noted that, some notable elders and traditional leaders are trying to impute ethnic and tribal reasons for the recent selective or reprisal attacks by the extremist religious group in Borno and Bauchi states. However, such notable elders should desist from such pronouncements in order not to stir the honey nest and serve as cannon fodders for ethno-tribal uprisings in the midst of religious ideology and retaliatory killings.

Only recently, a traditional ruler told the Chief of Army Staff in his palace that those behind the state of killings and breach of peace in Borno are "settlers" as monitored in the local news. But who are those "settlers"? In Nigeria it is always common for some misguided and ignorant leaders to make such jaundiced and biased statements in order to deliberately exculpate the tribes they represent from blames while pointing accusing fingers on so-called "settlers" in

their midst or non-followers of their religions which is mischievously contemptuous and to a great extent, malicious which can be repugnant to justice, fairness and equity.

The religious ideological being propagated by the extremists religious groups the world over has no tribal, ethnic, sectional or social barriers and demarcations. Ideologies are idiosyncrasies and doctrines being imparted and imbibed by any susceptible and gullible mind who is convinced beyond doubt about salvation, redemption and martyrdom. This was what resulted into Umar Abdul Mutallab, for example, to become radicalized. Same with the Hijra groups in 2001 in Kanamma who first started the agitation for reforms and Jihad. In the so-called "Boko Haram" ideology or "Da'awat wal Jihad" struggles, there are no settlers or indigenes but comrade or brothers in whatever they believe or profess in faith or "madhab" or doctrine. "Let us not introduce ethnicity and tribalism in to the problem thereby aggravating an already tensed situation. Our leaders should mind what they say or pronounce less they are accused of incitement or deliberate mischief to cause drift and chaos".

According to another Muslim scholar in Maiduguri in a chat with Desert Herald, "in Islam, it is not always the case to all to follow the teachings of same school of thoughts or "madhab". That is why there are different schools of Islamic or even Christian denominations.

However, it is regrettable, according to him, to note that members of the religion fight and kill simply because of difference in their jurisprudence, thoughts, and interpretations of their respective schools. He said the "Ulama should open up and address their members before Nigeria becomes another Pakistan, Iraq, Afghanistan, where bombs are planted in roadsides, markets, buses and even Mosques because of difference between doctrines of Sunni/Sunni, Sunni/Shiites, or even Shiites/Shiites. This is unnecessary. There must be tolerance, understanding and peace".

He advice that lovers of peaceful co-existence the world over have called for some international discourses and conferences to tackle inter and intra religious differences and conflicts with a view to tolerating the differences to live in peace and harmony. He acknowledged that Western nations such as US are among countries that promote the so-called terrorism due to their injustice and attempts to modernize Islam and to restrict strict practice of Islam.

Even thou freedom of religious practice is guaranteed under all laws, Western nations are against the adoption of strict practice of the Islamic law by Muslims which further cause hatred and dissatisfaction of the Western world by the so-called extremists Muslims. As a result, there is too much fundamentalism all over the world. He said **on** the part of rulers, they need to do justice for all because there cannot be peace without justice, anywhere. Corruption and wickedness, selfishness, nepotism, tribalism, he said are grossly condemned in all universal religions but our leaders/governors in Nigeria, Presidents, traditional rulers, chief executives etc, indulge in th em with recklessness and impunity. The people are denied, deprived and oppressed and left pauperized. Many resort to radical teachers and teachings in order to find solace and recourse, hence join to fight injustice which assuredly is reform of the status

quo can guarantee through Jihad. This is another attraction for the masses. The rich and powerful politicians must refocus, reform and redirect their for good or else such extremism and fundamentalism will continue to find homes and shelter in the minds of the poor and oppressed who will one day fight back with debilitating consequence in the forms of catechistic reprehensions like the merging cases in Borno and Bauchi states.

Desert Herald can reveal that top government functionaries and their agents like: commissioners, and legislators in Borno now live and sleep in Government House as fugitives since they are afraid to sleep in their palatial and exquisite homes for fear of reprisal attacks from the pugnacious radical Islamic groups in town who have defied the security operatives so far. The Government House is well fortified and secured by security men. Even the Giwa Barracks area of Gombole Road where Governor Sheriff resides is now fortified with reinforcement of Army personnel from the nearby Giwa Barracks and provides Governor Sheriff with security, but for how long? The best remedy, according to many concerned citizens, is for some dialogue and roundtable to negotiate the basis of ceasefire and final peaceful resolution of the conflict between the extremist group and the State Government before things get from bad to worse. A local chief in Borno who doesn't want to be mentioned and who appears devastated by the alarming rates of killings in the state thus pray for prompt and amicable compromise between the government and the powerful Boko Haram sect. "May we have peace in Borno the once upon a time home of peace in Nigeria is now a theater of killings and blood bath."

It should be pointed out also that, although some of the sporadic killings had religious connotations as attested to by the Ahlul-Sunna wal Jihad Group, through their supposed spokesman who granted an interview with foreign media previously, some dangerous criminal elements hiding under it have also taken advantage to kill, rob, maim or even assassinate political opponents, knowing well such killings will be viewed as retaliatory killings by the Islamists. "Politics definitely has a role here, and politicians cannot be totally absolved from blame", averred Audu Lawal, a resident of Maiduguri.

It is now the responsibility of the security operatives to be circumspect, vigilant and active in order to unravel and arrest the culprits who have been terrorizing residents of Maiduguri, under whatever canopies and guises and for the government to ensure justice by way of compensating the families of the victims of police impunity and to prosecute those that are found wanting particularly in instigating the Boko Harm uprising whose members are hitherto peaceful in conducting their affairs and doctrine. Specifically, they called for independent investigations on Ali Sherrif and some members of his cabinet for their alleged role in the killing spree of their members. Most residents spoken to by Desert Herald observed that they are afraid to even go out in search of their daily bread since the police sometimes swoop on even innocent citizens to whisk them away to prolonged detentions, under the pretext of investigations while the perpetrators of the killings go about unmolested, incognito and free only for them to strike again at will despite the heavy security presence. The Borno governor, according to sources, has partially relocated to Abuja while many a times he used to be in his personal resident in Chad.

[Description of Source: Kaduna Desert Herald in English--Privately owned, anti-government weekly newspaper]