

"Sectarian Violence: 4,000 policemen deployed in Kaduna, Gombe; Reps Summon Security Chiefs; Tension in Warri; UN Sec-Gen Ki-moon, JNI Shocked"

*Nigerian Compass Online* July 28, 2009 by Godwin Isenyo, Juliu Toba, Ted Odogwu, Samuel Ogidan, Aaron Ossai, Wole Oladimeji, Ayodele Adegbuyi, Joe Ogbodu.

Over 4, 000 policemen are on ground in Kaduna, the Kaduna State capital, and Gombe, the Gombe State capital, to prevent the spread of sectarian violence in the region to the two states.

Also yesterday, security agents in other states took measures to stop perpetrators of the violence from infiltrating their areas of jurisdiction.

The violence, started by Islamic fundamentalists in Bauchi, has spread to Borno, Yobe and Kano and claimed hundreds of lives.

The Nigerian Compass reliably gathered that members of the religious extremist group, called Boko Haramun in Hausa language, have been arriving Gombe since the beginning of the week with the aim of unleashing terror on uniformed men and certain government institutions.

Hundreds of the extremists in company of several hired fighters, mostly from Niger and Chad, have allegedly been relocating to unknown hideouts within the state, leaving many residents to face what they call the threat of grave insecurity.

The planned violent strike appears almost inevitable, as there are claims that the leaders of the Islamic group are reportedly piqued that their followers in Gombe did not rise in defence of those who suffered displacement during the conflicts in the neighbouring Maiduguri.

It was further learnt that the Islamists, who have been arriving the state in droves since the last weekend, are urging their followers through inciting preaching to rise up against the constituted authorities regardless of where they find themselves.

Sources said that while many youths and adults, who believe in their cause, had been made to tear their educational certificates, others who were workers, reportedly resigned, all in a bid to distance themselves from Western cultures.

Several armed anti-riot policemen, soldiers and other detectives have, however, begun a 24-hour patrol and surveillance of major streets in the state capital to prevent a breakdown of law and others.

This confirmed President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua's statement yesterday that the situation had been brought under control.

The President, before he travelled to Brazil, said he had directed security agencies to arrest the growing unrest.

"There has been very serious action. In fact, we have the situation under control now and I believe by the end of today (yesterday), everything would have taken shape. I have been monitoring the situation in the last few days. By yesterday (Monday), the situation in Bauchi and other states had been contained. What we have now is a situation in Borno State where the leader of the so-called Taliban group is residing and where most of them have migrated from all the Northern states to go, prepare and declare the holy war.

"We are going to launch an operation, the main operation with immediate effect. I have just finished meeting with our Defence chiefs who have been in constant contact with the governors of Borno, Bauchi, Kano and other affected states. So, this situation is being brought under control and I want to assure the nation that this administration will not tolerate any arms insurrection anywhere.

The Nigerian Compass learnt that some anti-riot policemen, acting on a tip-off on Monday evening, swooped on the Jankai Mosque in Jakadefari area of the Gombe metropolis, believed to be used as one of the Islamists' hideouts to seize them.

But some of them were said to have resisted arrest.

The state Police Commissioner, Joseph Ibi, told reporters that seven suspected fundamentalists are already in police custody for allegedly constituted themselves into a security risk.

He said the suspects were arrested in a village in Kwami Local Government Area over their suspicious movements, while their conspirators are being trailed.

Ibi justified the deployment of 3, 000 policemen, saying the command could not play down the possibility of a bloody conflict in Gombe after the recent bloodbath in the neighbouring states.

He revealed that a joint security team had started gathering intelligence on the whereabouts of the fundamentalists and to clamp down on them wherever they were found in the state.

He, however, told the scared residents of the state to be calm, as the situation is under control.

In Kaduna, the state security outfit, code-named, Operation Yaki, said it would crush any form of insurgence.

For instance, many parts of the Kaduna metropolis witnessed serious traffic gridlocks yesterday as the security agents embarked on intense stop and search of vehicles to prevent the fundamentalists from accessing the city.

Members of the security outfit from the Army, Air Force, Police, State Security Services (SSS) and the Nigerian Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC) were strategically positioned at roundabouts in the metropolis and the Sheik Abubakar Gummi Central Market, as well as the Nnamdi Azikwe Western Bye-pass leading to the Abuja-Kaduna Expressway.

Flash points in the state, such as Tundun-Wada, Kawo, Sabon Tasha, Angwar Sarki Musulumi and Angwar Rimi, among others, were heavily guarded by security agents to nip any violence in the bud.

A senior security official, who craved anonymity, told our correspondent that the outfit was not taking any chances because of past experiences of religious crises.

"Even as a student, you can't continue to be failing your examination after series of failures. You must learn from your past failures. Kaduna had witnessed more religious crises than any other state in the region in recent times. So, the government of the day is not taking chances at all. We have been ordered to crush any militant, who finds his way to the state for any nefarious activity," he said.

Another security official threatened: "Let them come if they are not afraid to die. Look, let me tell you the way Kaduna is now, no any right-thinking person will attempt to embark on any violent attack on anybody. Those residents in the state have had their own fair share of violence. Even those that will come from the neighbouring states for attack must be well prepared."

Despite the tension, many residents of the state were going about their normal economic and social activities yesterday.

Even, banks and financial institutions operated normally.

Governor Namadi Sambo of Kaduna State yesterday warned the fundamentalists to steer clear of his state.

Speaking shortly after the President of Nigeria Union of Journalists (NUJ), Mohammed Garba, paid him a courtesy call at the Sir Kashim Ibrahim House, Kaduna, Sambo said it is unfortunate that some people under the guise of

religion were causing problem in the country.

He said that the Yar'Adua-led government would not fold its hands and watch some elements threaten the corporate existence of the country.

Just as Sambo was tongue-lashing the fundamentalists, the umbrella body of Muslims in the 19 Northern states and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), the Jama'atul Nasril Islam (JNI), also dissociated itself from the Islamic group in Kaduna.

The body described the group as "misguided" lots, who were deceiving the entire Muslim community.

The JNI in a statement signed by its Secretary-General, Alhaji Abdulkarim Mu'azu Palladan, urged all Muslims in the country to condemn the violence.

According to the group, it would not fold its arms and watch "the carnage and madness" going on in some Northern states under the guise of Islam, adding: "We wish, therefore, to categorically dissociate Islam from the activities of the Boko misguided group and denounce the wanton murders and destruction of properties perpetrated by this group."

The JNI added that its Central Fatwa Committee would soon meet to deliberate on the teachings of this group and act appropriately, "so that Muslims and non-Muslims alike will be assured of the fact that this Boko group is criminal and un-Islamic."

It added: "We call on all Muslims in the country to condemn these criminal activities and give maximum support to security agencies in preventing these misguided youths from attacking anybody or agency in the country.

"Efforts are being made to see that sanity is restored to those areas already affected and that peace and security is maintained in all other areas."

In Kano, the death toll in the crises rose to four yesterday, following the death of one of the suspects, who was wounded in the Wudil attack.

Also yesterday, the Kano State Police Command arrested 20 suspected fundamentalists in a pit toilet in Wudil, bringing the total number of those seized to 56, even as 11 members of the sect are in critical condition at the Murtala Muhammed Specialist Hospital, Kano, following bullet wounds they suffered when they clashed with the police.

All those arrested are still held at the command headquarters in Bompai, while security operatives, according to the

command Spokesman, Baba Mohammed, were yesterday busy combing all the nooks and crannies of the state in search of the fleeing members of the group.

About 33 members of the group, believed to have strayed into Kano from the neighbouring Bauchi State and far away Borno State, were arrested by a crack team of policemen from the Kano Command in the early hours of Monday after a gun duel

The fundamentalists struck in Kano about 3.30am on Monday, attacking a police station in Wudil Local Government Area of the state, during which they shot and injured the Divisional Police Officer (DPO), Sagir Idris, and an unidentified Mobile Police (MOPOL) officer and made away with two AK 47 rifles belonging to the police.

During a counter-attack launched by the police, led by the Deputy Commissioner of Police in the command, Tanko Idris, they succeeded in killing two members of the sect and impounded various weapons used by them.

Those arrested, many of who sustained gunshot wounds, were, thereafter, paraded at the Command Headquarters on Monday.

While about seven of the suspects are teenagers, some are as young as seven years old.

In their possession were various kinds of weapons, amulets, international passports as well as red, black and white scarves of various sizes, believed to be their trade marks.

Police spokesman, Baba Mohammed, while briefing newsmen, claimed that the rifles snatched from the police were yet to be recovered.

He, however, assured the residents that the command has mounted a manhunt for the stolen rifles, as well as the suspected leader of the group, Mallam Salisu Wudil, who has gone underground with some of his members.

The police spokesman, who paraded 33 of the suspects, including the only girl, Aisha Abass, emphasised that the group infiltrated Kano after they were dislodged from Maiduguri and Bauchi, where they wreaked havoc in the last few days.

Aisha, who claimed to be 14, said she was brainwashed by her dad's friend and Islamic cleric, Mallam Abdulmumuni Ibrahim Mohammed, to abandon the Government Girls' Secondary School, Maidoki, where she was in JSS 2 by her father's friend and Islamic teacher (names withheld).

She further alleged that she was not told of their destination by her father, who simply asked her to proceed on the journey to Gaya for an Islamic function.

In an interview with newsmen, Mohammed said he is not apologetic about the cause he represents, adding that it is Haram (un-Islamic) to acquire Western education.

Mohammed, who runs an Islamiyya (religious school) at Panshekara, on the outskirts of Kano, one of the component groups of the sect, said he gained Islamic knowledge from Nassarawa State before relocating to Kano.

The Islamic teacher said if he ever regains freedom from the police, he would carry on fighting for the cause he believes in, quoting copiously from the Holy Quran to back his claims that Western education is "evil".

He, however, feigned ignorance of any attack on the Wudil Police Station, saying they were only on their way to Gaya, a neighbouring council, for an Islamic preaching.

Also yesterday, security was beefed up in the oil city of Warri and its environs in Delta State over concerns that some militants in the volatile Niger Delta region may capitalise on the situation to unleash mayhem on some innocent persons.

A combined team of policemen and soldiers from the Joint Military Task Force (JTF) patrolled the city and the neighbouring Effurun.

Two Armoured Personal Carries (APC) with seven vans fully loaded with troops were sighted in the city.

The development, it was learnt, was as a result of speculations that some militants were planning to capitalise on the mayhem to invade the Hausa community in Warri, particularly if they hear of any attack on Niger Deltans in the North.

Already, the relocation of the Federal University of Petroleum from Effurun to Kaduna has led to tension in the former.

The students of the upgraded Petroleum Training Institute (PIT) took to the streets last week to protest the relocation.

But, contacted on phone yesterday, the Joint Media Campaign Centre Coordinator of the JTF, Colonel Rabe Abubakar, ruled out any threat to security in the area, saying that the patrol was normal and part of its routine surveillance.

He said that he has not received any report of security threat over the development in the North but noted that as a

security outfit, the JTF must be at alert and never take chances.

He added: "We are on top of the security situation in the area and would continue to do our best to nip in the bud anything that could lead to crisis.

"It is a normal security surveillance. There is no cause for alarm. Armoured Personnel Carriers have been coming and going. It is not a new thing. We are only trying to make sure that the area continues to be peaceful, that is all."

The House of Representatives yesterday ordered the Acting Inspector-General of Police, Ogbonna Onovo, and other security agents to fish out perpetrators of the mayhem and punish them accordingly.

Sequel to this, the House Committee on Interior has summoned all the security operatives to appear before it and explain the way out of insecurity in the country.

The committee chairman of the committee, Jerry Manwe, stated that insecurity has reached certain level that the House has to do something very urgent "before the country is consumed by those who want to destabilise it."

Passing a motion of urgent national importance moved by Alhaji Rabe Nasir from Katsina State on the sectarian crisis, members unanimously agreed that the security agents be directed to investigate the remote and immediate causes of the crisis to avoid future recurrence.

Members at plenary also unanimously accepted part of Nasir's prayers that the security agents should be warned that if they allow such breakdown of law and order in their various areas, they stand the risk of being relieved of their duties.

While members condemned in its entirety a situation where a group of people under whatever umbrella would attack, kill and maim innocent citizens, they also blamed the security agents for not being proactive to nip the situation in the bud in Bauchi.

Leading the debate on the general principles of the motion, Nassir said the group was a bunch of criminals hiding under the cover of Islam, explaining that the religion did not only preach peace, but encourages education of any sort.

He urged the House to do something about the crisis without delay because, according to him, if the matter is handled with kid gloves, the crisis could spread to other parts of the country and snowball into anarchy.

His words: "This House should do something urgent to stop the crisis before it gets out of hand. What happened is an

indictment on the part of our security agents, they were unable to detect this group at its formation stage. If not, how can such a large number of youths mobilise themselves in various states without being noticed?

"We are not proactive in our security operations; the House should take a drastic action on this matter. The government is paying lip service to security matters. How can a country of over 150 million people be policed by just a little over 300,000 ill-equipped policemen."

In his contribution to the debate, Dr. Patrick Asadu (PDP, Enugu State), stressed the importance of security in the life of every nation, explaining that it is not in the best interest of Nigerians to harbour such a group without being detected by security agents.

The Deputy Minority Leader, Alhaji Ismaila Kawo, said Islam preaches peace and that anybody who kills a fellow human being cannot be a true Muslim.

John Halims Agoda and Alhaji Aminu Tambuwal condemned the violence and canvassed punishment for the perpetrators.

While the Representatives said they would summon Onovo, he also appeared before the Senate yesterday for the second time in one week over the security situation in the country.

He visited the upper chamber with the Director-General of the State Security Service (SSS), Afakrya Gadzama, the Minister of Interior, Shetima Mustapha, and the National Security Adviser, Seriki Muktar,

Senate spokesman, Ayogu Eze, who briefed the press yesterday after the closed-door session with the security chiefs, said that in view of the insecurity, increased funding for the police and recruitment into the force have been approved by the senators.

He said: "We have met with the people who are charged with the internal security of the country today and there were frank exchanges...and it was an eye opening session.

"The decision of the Senate is that we will be holding such meetings with them regularly. On the part of the Senate, attention will be on giving enough money to the police because they are grossly underfunded and understaffed.

"We have also asked the security agencies to take inter agencies intelligence seriously.

"The Senate saw what happened in some parts of North-East and North- West of the country. We are depressed that



some people who have benefited from Western education now turn back to incite people against Western education.

"We have asked the security agencies to buckle up. If we are going to be among the 20 most developed country in year 2020, we must begin to live it now."

In a related development, Senator Bala Mohammed (PDP, Bauchi) yesterday tried unsuccessfully to move a motion on the crisis.

Bala had warned the Senate that unless urgent action was taken to stop the crisis, it could envelope the entire country.

Coming under "matters of public importance", the senator noted that those who masterminded the Bauchi crisis had prior to the final assault vigorously campaigned against the government and imposition of Western culture in the country without a check from the security agencies.

He further informed his colleagues that the rioters were of the Boko Haram Islamic group, who besides their opposition to Western education, were devoted to imposing Islamism as the art of governance and protest against "corruption on the part of the government that has impoverished the people."

With this statement, Senate President David Mark ruled Bala out of order, saying that since the nation's security chiefs were expected to brief the Senate behind closed doors on the security situation, it was no use debating the motion.

Meanwhile, security has been beefed up in Abuja as security men have been deployed in strategic parts of the Federal Capital Territory (FCT).

The military and the police were seen patrolling the city in APC, while some positioned themselves in areas prone to violence and crisis.

Meanwhile, the Minister of State for FCT, Chief Chuka Odom, yesterday called on the government and relevant agencies charged with the responsibility of protecting lives and properties to urgently address the rate of insecurity in the land.

The minister, who was apparently distressed with the level of insecurity in the country, especially in the South- East, regretted that the situation in the region has deteriorated.

In a statement made available to Nigerian Compass in Abuja, Odom said "the security situation has deteriorated so much that if something drastic is not done immediately at the regional level to reassert the authority of the states to guarantee the safety of lives and properties, the region may be heading to a state of anarchy."

He noted that no meaningful development can occur in an atmosphere of fear and insecurity, asking: "How can the state provide the much needed infrastructure, if the construction companies engaged to do the work are pulling out and the more reputable ones are refusing to accept new jobs in the area for fear of the safety of their personnel."

He lamented the mass exodus of industrialists from the commercial centre of Onitsha, Aba and Owerri to Abuja for fear of being kidnapped and lamented that with such development, no meaningful growth will occur in the region.

Odom disclosed that insecurity in the South-East revolves around organised crime rings operating without regard to state boundaries.

The only solution to the problem, according to him, is a joint and coordinated effort by the states to successfully dismantle the criminal network and their terror infrastructure.

The Minister however called on the South-East governors to quickly convene a security summit to examine in great details the problem and work out short, medium and long term solutions.

Besides, he called on other stakeholders, such as the telecommunications sector, security agencies, the private sector and the civil society groups to join hands with the governors to ensure a holistic approach to the worsening security situation.

United Nations Secretary-General, Ban Ki-moon, yesterday expressed his sadness over the killings.

"Mr. Ban condemns the unnecessary loss of human life and the destruction of property as a result of militant attacks," his spokesperson, Farhan Haq, told journalists in response to a question. "He hopes that those behind the attacks would be identified and brought to justice in accordance with the law."

"The Secretary-General calls upon the government of Nigeria, law enforcement and security agencies, as well as religious and community leaders, to work together to address the underlying causes of the frequent religious clashes in Nigeria so that a resolution could be found through dialogue, tolerance and understanding."