

# VANGUARD

## **Nigeria: Plateau Massacre - We Did It - Boko Haram - It's a Lie - Police**

*By Taye Obateru, 11 July 2012*

Jos — The police authorities, yesterday, disputed claims by Islamic sect, Boko Haram which claimed responsibility for weekend's massacre in some villages in Plateau State. More than 86 people including two lawmakers were killed in the mayhem, even as there were fresh attacks on two villages yesterday.

The Islamic sect in a statement purportedly issued by its spokesman, Abu Qaqa claiming responsibility for the killings said: "Jama'atu Ahlissunnah Lidda'awati Wal-Jihad wants to inform the world of its delight over the success of the attacks we launched on Barkin Ladi and Riyom in Plateau State on Christians and security operatives, including members of the National Assembly. We will continue to hunt government officials wherever they are; they will have no peace again."

Disputing Boko Haram's claim, however, a police source in Plateau who requested anonymity told AFP that if Boko Haram were involved, it would be because the Fulani invited them to take part. Suspected Fulani were the ones that carried out that attack. That is the opinion of the police". The source specified that the Fulani herdsmen were responsible for both the Saturday and Sunday violence.

A member of the House of Representatives representing Jos South and Jos East Federal Constituency, Bitrus Kaze said that foreign mercenaries were responsible for the attacks in some communities last weekend. The federal lawmaker who was a guest on Channels Television's Sunrise Daily programme said that these mercenaries some of who are from Chad have stayed in the Fulani community in Plateau State for about two years.

### **Two more villages attacked**

Meanwhile, two more villages in Barkin-Ladi Local Government Area have been attacked by gunmen who reduced them to rubble. The attack was confirmed yesterday by member representing Riyom Constituency in the Plateau State House of Assembly, Mr. Daniel Dem who gave the names of the villages as Tse and Shong.

"I can authoritatively confirm to you that as I am talking to you now, the same gunmen from top of the mountains have attacked two more villages. The two villages, Tse and Shong have been reduced to ruin with no house standing. The gunmen came in their usual style with sporadic shooting.

"The villagers were scared and they ran out of their houses and the gunmen set the houses ablaze rendering them homeless and increasing the number of displaced people", he said.

He said about 140 corpses were strewn all over the area now because people are afraid to go and pick them up for burial since Sunday's attack on the burial procession.

The Plateau State Government has, however, relaxed the curfew imposed in four local government areas of the state by five hours. It announced after a State Security Council meeting on Tuesday that the curfew would now be from 6pm to 7am.

Lawmaker flays emergency rule in four LGAs

Still smarting from his miraculous escape in an attack that took away two other law makers, member representing Barkin-Ladi/Riyom Constituency in the House of Representatives, Mr. Simon Mwadkon has

said that there had been more killings and destruction since President Goodluck Jonathan declared a state of emergency on four local government areas of the state, saying it is time to review the declaration.

"It is time to review the security situation, especially the state of emergency because it has achieved nothing. If anything, there has been more killings, more destruction of farmlands during this period than any other. Everybody has been pushed to the wall and I am tired of telling the people to be calm. People must defend themselves", he said.

He told journalists yesterday that the attacks on his constituents by the Fulani is a continuation of the 'jihad' which started since 1804 to forcefully Islamize minority tribes in the Northern part of the country, adding that his people were regretting their hospitality to the Fulani.

He also expressed the desire of the Fulani to acquire more land for grazing as another reason adding that they are always seeking ways of gaining more grounds.

Reacting to statements credited to an official of the Miyetti Allah Cattle Breeders Association, Mallam Saleh Bayari that the Fulani were retaliating attacks on them in past crises in the state during which they lost several lives and property, Mwadkon said there was no truth in the claim.

"It had been the agenda of the Fulani since the jihad of Usman Dan Fodio, who proclaimed that for the whole North to be Islamized, all the Northern minorities must be conquered. It has been the agenda since 1804 when the jihadists failed to capture the Middle belt region, which they want to use as a launching pad to capture the south. It is their belief that once the Northern minorities were captured, they will be willing tools for the capture of the South.

"Another reason is the quest for grazing reserves and that was why the House of Representatives killed the bill on grazing reserves because it has caused a lot of havoc in the country. I don't know why they are saying that they lost property in 2001 because the 2001 crisis only ended in Riyom. It never got to Gashish (the area attacked last Saturday).

"And talking about their destroyed villages, I don't know how many villages they have because you know these people are not indigenes. They don't have any village. All the places they settled, they bought from the natives and paid royalties. It's just that after a time, we felt that they have integrated enough and allowed them and this we regret till today", he said.

Mwadkon had on Monday accused some men of the Special Task Force maintaining security in the state of complicity in the attacks on his people, adding that there was an Al-Queda base within some farmlands in Riyom Local Government Area which needed to be uprooted.

STF confirms 86 killed

Meantime, the Special Task Force (STF) in charge of security in Plateau State has given the number of those killed in last weekend's violence in the state as 86 made up of the two lawmakers, 63 villagers and 21 of the attackers.

STF's spokesman, Captain Salisu Mustapha confirmed to journalists yesterday that two anti-riot policemen were also killed in the attack but said no other person died in the attack on the funeral procession on Sunday apart from the two lawmakers.

He denied reports that soldiers ran away from the scene following the attack on the funeral procession at Matse, adding that what happened was that the commanding officer ordered those present to lie down flat when the shooting started but rather than heed his instruction, the people started running leading to a stampede.

His clarification has, however, not doused allegations of complicity of some military men in the attacks on the villages as both Governor Jonah Jang and member representing Barkin-Ladi/Riyom federal constituency, Mr. Simon Mwadkon re-echoed this at different fora, yesterday.

Jang while receiving Governor Gabriel Suswam of Benue State who led a delegation on sympathy visit to his Plateau State counterpart said it was clear that there were "enemies within".

According to him, "something must definitely be wrong. I have seen it and some of you have seen it that there is a lot of collusion even within the security forces. A lot of the members of Boko Haram and others are also part of the security men that are wearing uniforms today.

"Even when you plan operations, before you carry out the operations, the enemies have already known. Having been part of the military forces, it is a very dangerous thing to have enemy within, it is the most dangerous enemy you can ever have."

Mwadkon had levelled similar allegation, noting that the manner of attack on the funeral precession at Matse on Sunday was suspicious.

"Before the attack, a member of the STF asked us to relocate the ambulance we brought to the village on the premise that he wants to bring in an armoured tank. We complied without wasting time, only for him to bring in a Hi-lux vehicle to block the only access road leading to the village.

"The next thing we heard was a signal shot which was later followed by the appearance of gunmen from the nearby hills. The entire military men within the vicinity took to their heels leaving behind a police man who piloted us. We could not escape because the only narrow road to the area had been blocked by the Hi-lux vehicle.

"While we were running, there was a gunshot that disorganized us and many of us fell down. The Majority Leader, Plateau State House of Assembly, Hon. Gyang Fulani and Senator Dantong were unconscious and put in separate vans. But to my surprise one hour after I got to the hospital, the two vans which left before me had not arrived. When Hon. Fulani was brought he died in my presence while Dantong was brought dead to the hospital. So something is wrong somewhere," he said.

Suswam had during the condolence visit to Jang described the death of a Senator of the Federal Republic of Nigeria in the manner Dantong died as a national disgrace advising that it should not be seen as a Plateau problem but one which every patriotic Nigerian must come together to find a solution.

He said: "This has become a recurring decimal in Plateau. I believe that as leaders, we must together, find a solution to this. It is not a Plateau problem, this is a Nigerian problem. This incident is of course a shame to the entire nation that a distinguished senator of the Federal Republic and a member of the House could die in an incident such as this.

"This is unfortunate and this must attract the concern of all well-meaning Nigerians. I believe also as leaders, we should not stand by and watch this drift into an irreversible crisis in this country.

"It is difficult for people who have lost their loved ones to take this easily except we as leaders live up to our responsibilities," he said.