

JOS, PLATEAU STATE CAPITAL, NORTH CENTRAL NIGERIA – BURNS AGAIN

Hardly had the cloud of smoke and grieving families who lost their homes, properties, means of livelihood and loved ones come to terms with the trail of woes and pains left behind at the aftermath of November 2008 mindless sectarian mayhem in Jos town, the Plateau state capital, north-central Nigeria, the town erupted again on Sunday, 17th of January 2010, with yet another wave of bloodletting, purportedly occasioned by what reports claimed to be a simple civil altercations, which later turned to a war theatre.

It was reported that one Mallam Garba or (Alh. Kabiru Mohammed) a Muslim, who had his home burnt in a suburb settlement known as Dutse-Uku in Nassarawa – Gwong area, in Jos north local government area, encroached on the plot of his Christian neighbour while rebuilding his burnt property. This development resulted in hot arguments and turned ugly as youths from both sides of the arguing parties, purportedly took sides with their own. This development as reported would have died down as a civil issue that would have been resolved by the appropriate civil authorities or courts on a later date but the Muslim youths chose to “settle” the issue their own way, by attacking Christian worshippers in St. Michael Catholic Church, Nassarawa – Gwong, killed and injured some, and burnt down the church building. Other settlements attacked were Rikkos, Yanshanu, Anguwan Duala, Congo Russia, Tudun-Fera and Bukuru Etc.

But the Christian elders in Jos Plateau state, in a statement by its national coordinator, Bishop Andersen Bok and secretary-general, Dr. Musa Pam as reported in the Guardian newspaper of Monday 18th January 2010 said, “in very strong terms, we hereby condemn today’s (Sunday 17th) attack on Christians in Jos, the capital of Plateau state, in which several persons have been reported injured or dead. The attack coming in the wake of today, Sunday, 17th January, 2010, after normal Christian services in Churches is premeditated, wicked, deliberate and terrifying. Our fellow brothers and Sisters were just coming out of churches in Nassarawa area of Jos when some Islamic youths pounced on them with cutlasses and other dangerous weapons. Shortly after the attack, we were made to believe that some Islamic fundamentalists were engaging themselves in some fracas after some disagreement, which spilled into churches leading to Christian casualties. Why must it be churches and Christians who will suffer from an all – Muslim affair? In the last Jos crisis, the same Christians became casualties after some Muslims protested an election result that was intended to elect local council chairman. Why will Islamic fundamentalists engage them selves on a Sunday morning shortly after the service if the ‘Terror’ act was not premeditated?”

This position of the Christian elders was corroborated by the Plateau state commissioner of police, Mr. Gregory Anyanting, in a news briefing in his office as reported by the Daily

Trust newspaper of Monday 18th January, 2010. He said “The crisis was caused by some Muslim youths who without provocation, attacked worshippers at the Saint Michael Catholic Church in Nassarawa Gwong Area”. He said “Investigation were still on to establish the cause of the violence”.

The plateau state government under the leadership of the state governor, Jonah Jang responded to the crisis by imposing a dusk to dawn (6pm - 6am) curfew on Jos and the surrounding settlements on that Sunday, 17th of January, 2010. But after a lull in the bloodletting on Monday, it erupted again strongly, on Tuesday, 19th January, 2010 despite the 12 hours curfew in places like Bukuru, Dadin Kowa, Rusau, Mai Adiko, Bauchi Road and Tudun wada which prompted the government to extend the curfew to 24 hours. Along with the curfew and intensified police patrol, the federal Government of Nigeria ordered armed soldiers to join the police and other security agencies to enforce peace in the capital, its environs and state as a whole.

So far, about 20 churches, 200 Christian homes have been burnt down and 600 lives lost.

Some of the churches burnt down are;

1. Evangelical Church of West Africa (ECWA), Bishara 1, Gyero road, Bukuru
2. Assemblies of God (AG) – Gyero Road, Bukuru
3. Church of Christ in Nigeria (COCIN) – Dogon Dutse
4. Bishara Baptist Church, Nassarawa
5. Kauna Baptist Church, Rikkos
6. Bethel Baptist Church, Rikkos
7. Evangelical Church of West Africa (ECWA), Nassarawa
8. Church of Christ in Nigeria (COCIN) – Duala
9. Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG), Nassarawa – Gwong
10. Evangelical Church of West Africa (ECWA) – Rikkos
11. Cherubim and Seraphim (C and S) Church, Gyero road Bukuru

The question that baffles the mind is, what is the link between a civil altercation by individuals that will lead to attacking Christian worshippers, burning down their churches and homes, and the lost of lives?