

Nigeria

16 Loud Deaths, 60 Silent Graves

By Lemmy Ughegbe, Ph.D

The recent tragedies in Uromi, Edo State, and in Bokkos and Mangu Local Government Areas of Plateau State have once again exposed a disturbing inconsistency in national responses to incidents of mass violence in Nigeria. These two grim episodes, separated by geography and nuance, nonetheless raise the same essential question: do all Nigerian lives matter equally? On the 28th of March 2025, a group of 16 hunters travelling from Rivers State to Kano for the Sallah celebration were lynched by a mob in Uromi, Edo State. According to various sources, they were carrying locally fabricated Dane Guns, a practice not uncommon among hunters and vigilante groups in Nigeria. However, due to the persistent insecurity in Uromi and the surrounding region—marked by a surge in kidnappings, rape, and murders—the presence of armed men travelling together was enough to raise suspicion.

The group was mistaken for a kidnapping gang, and without trial, without investigation, they were summarily executed by enraged locals in what has come to be widely condemned as an act of Jungle Justice. This incident received an immediate and robust response from across the nation. Within a few hours of news of this incident, President Bola Ahmed Tinubu condemned the murder of the sixteen (16) Dane Gun wielding hunters and directed security agencies to conduct swift and thorough investigations to apprehend and prosecute those responsible. The House of Representatives swiftly passed a resolution condemning the killings, describing them as a “grave violation of human rights and the rule of law,” while urging security agencies to identify, arrest, and prosecute those responsible. Former Vice President Atiku Abubakar condemned the act, calling it “barbaric and inhumane,” and reminded Nigerians that no amount of frustration or distrust in security agencies justifies taking laws into their own hands. Peter Obi, Former Governor of Anambra State and former Presidential Candidate, added that “we must never become a nation where due process is replaced with mob anger. A just society is one where every individual, guilty or innocent, is treated according to the law.” The Nigerian Bar Association (NBA) also weighed in, issuing a stern statement that condemned the rise of mob justice across the country. “The Nigerian Constitution presumes every accused person innocent until proven otherwise,” the statement read. “No person or group has the right to act as judge, jury, and executioner.” Governor Abba Yusuf of Kano State, where most of the slain hunters hailed from, expressed outrage and called the incident a betrayal of the country's collective humanity, demanding a thorough investigation and the arrest of perpetrators. Rivers State Governor Siminalayi Fubara described the incident as a “gruesome murder of innocent citizens” and emphasized the need for community awareness and responsible security engagement.

The Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) also joined the national chorus of condemnation. In a statement signed by its

President, Archbishop Daniel Okoh, CAN described the killings as “a sad reminder of the breakdown of law and order and the growing tendency among citizens to take the law into their own hands.” The Christian body called on security agencies to not only bring the perpetrators to justice but also to rebuild public trust. “We sue for justice and peace, and we urge communities to seek lawful redress rather than vengeance. Mob action, no matter the provocation, cannot be justified in any civilized society,” the statement read. In contrast, between the 2nd and 3rd of April 2025, barely a week after the Edo incident, a fresh massacre took place in Plateau State. This time, in the Bokkos and Mangu Local Government Areas, over 60 villagers were brutally killed in coordinated night-time attacks by armed men, reportedly wearing military camouflage. According to local residents and community leaders, the assailants moved from one village to another, slaughtering men, women, and children indiscriminately. Homes were set ablaze, food barns looted, and entire communities uprooted. Though the exact number of casualties is still being counted, early estimates suggest that more than 60 lives were lost, and over 1,500 people displaced.

Shockingly, the national response to this tragedy was tepid at best. There was no immediate address from the President. The National Assembly did not pass any resolution condemning the killings. Religious and Traditional Institutions that had been vociferous in their reaction to the Edo lynchings remained largely silent. The Nigerian Bar Association (NBA) that was so

The inconsistency in national mourning and governmental response is not new, but it remains deeply troubling. It points to a hierarchy of empathy that undermines the spirit of our Constitution, which holds that all citizens are equal before the law and in the protection of the state. There is also the matter of Media Framing. The Edo victims were identified as “hunters” and “travelers,” suggesting purposeful and legitimate activity, while the Plateau victims were referred to merely as “villagers.” This subtle but powerful difference dehumanizes one group and sanitizes the tragedy. Moreover, while images and tributes poured in for the 16 hunters, the identities and stories of the Plateau victims remained mostly anonymous. Who were they? What dreams did they harbour? What futures were snatched away? The irony is painful. The Edo victims, suspected without proof, were mourned as martyrs, while the Plateau victims, clearly innocent and ambushed in their homes, remain statistics in an ever-growing tally of unacknowledged dead.

The Federal Government must urgently address this apparent apathy towards the Middle Belt and the growing narrative that those in conflict-prone regions are beyond help. Resources, political will, and national attention must not be rationed based on who shouts the loudest or hails from the most politically connected quarters. Religious Bodies and Traditional Institutions that lend their voices during other national tragedies must rise with equal fervor for the Plateau victims. Civil Society must not look away. The Media must resist the urge to move on just because these killings have become frequent. We must not let our frequency of exposure dull our humanity. Ultimately, we must ask ourselves as a people: What kind of nation do we want to be? One that only mourns selectively? One that lets outrage be governed by convenience? One that refuses to learn from its silence? Until we confront these questions sincerely and act decisively, we will remain a nation unsure of its soul—where grief is not a right, and where silence, not justice, follows the wail of the dying.

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loud on the Edo killings, seemed to have lost his voice suddenly. Thankfully, the Plateau State Governor, Caleb Mutfwang, still has his voice; he has expressed his sorrow and called for reinforcement of security in the region. Amnesty International Nigeria tweeted about the killings, expressing “deep concern over the ongoing carnage” and demanding urgent Federal intervention. Then, in what many considered an afterthought, the Presidency finally broke its silence. Yesterday, Chief Bayo Onanuga, Special Adviser to the President on Information and Strategy, issued a statement on behalf of President Bola Ahmed Tinubu. The statement condemned the killings in Plateau and assured Nigerians that the Federal Government was committed to bringing the perpetrators to justice. However, the timing and tone of the release struck many observers as lacklustre and reactive, rather than proactive and presidential. Critics noted that the statement came days after the massacre, and only after mounting public pressure online. This stark disparity in responses calls for serious reflection. Why did the killing of 16 hunters evoke such national outrage while the murder of over 60 villagers barely registered a whimper? Is this merely an oversight, or does it reflect a more systemic bias in how different regions and people are treated within Nigeria's Federation?

We must examine what kind of country we are becoming when some deaths are met with outrage and others with silence. The issue is not whether one set of killings is more tragic than the other—it's the implication that some lives are worth fighting for while others are dispensable. This selective empathy reveals a dangerous trend. We have normalized violence in the Middle Belt and other parts of the North. It has become routine, and in that routineness, we lose our sense of humanity. That's how genocides start—first through indifference. Social Media users were equally vocal. One X (formerly Twitter) user wrote, “Nigeria weeps for 16 hunters. May their souls rest in peace. But why is Nigeria silent for over 60 Plateau villagers? Is it because they are 'just villagers'? Or are we too used to their pain?” Another user posted, “These villagers had names, dreams, children, futures. Their deaths deserve the same national mourning as anyone else's. Our silence is complicity.”

The inconsistency in national mourning and governmental

Of course, nothing justifies the lynching of the 16 in Edo. Even if they had been criminals—which they were not—Mob Justice is a regression to lawlessness and brutality. But equally, the Plateau killings, perpetrated by organized gunmen who roam freely and strike with impunity, deserve even greater condemnation and urgency. If 16 deaths can bring a country to attention, how can 60 not compel action? Security Failure is at the heart of both tragedies. In Uromi, the mob acted out of frustration over repeated kidnappings and a lack of effective policing. In Plateau, the attacks were yet another chapter in a long-running saga of unaddressed ethno-religious conflict, land disputes, and governmental inaction. In both cases, the state failed to protect its citizens, and in both cases, civilians paid the ultimate price. If Nigeria is to become a just and truly democratic nation, it must begin to react equitably to the sufferings of its people. There must be no North or South in empathy, no Christian or Muslim in justice, no Farmer or Hunter in dignity. Every Nigerian Life must be counted, named, honoured, and defended.

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