

Killings on the Plateau: The shame of a nation

By Etim Etim

The brutal killings of over 160 Nigerians in three LGAs in Plateau state on Christmas Eve and Christmas Day by terrorists have once again illustrated the failure of the Nigerian state to protect its citizens. Over 20 villages across Barkin Ladi, Bokkos and Mangu LGAs were attacked in what has become a pattern of a failed or a fast-failing state. I am sad, pained and aggrieved by the flagrant failure of the security agencies to thwart the terrorists' plots or arrest them after their heinous crimes. Many Nigerians, including a retired general who had once served as the commander of Operation Safe Heaven on the Plateau, Gen. Henry Ayoola, believe that there are elements in the security agencies that collude with the terrorists and are complicit in these killings.

Defence Headquarters, the highest authority of the military high command, has stated that although the military did receive over 30 distress calls from the villagers when the attacks were going on, it could not respond soon enough because the terrain in those communities is bad. What an excuse! It sounds like the police telling victims of armed robbery that they had no petrol in their vehicles or the fire service complaining of lack of water in their trucks while a home is burning. How did the terrorists gain access to the communities if the terrain was that bad? Excuses like this give credence to speculations that some soldiers and, perhaps, officers may be sympathetic to the agenda and ideology of the killers.

The frequency of the killings and the fact that no single person has ever been arrested and prosecuted also support

the theory of collusion by some members of our police and armed forces. It brings a sinking feeling to my stomach. Last June, over 100 villagers were slaughtered by terrorists in Mangu LGA alone. Nigerians of different walks of life and some members of the international community have been shocked by what is apparently ethnic cleansing of the Christian communities of some parts of northern Nigeria. The Sultan of Sokoto, Middle Belt Forum, PANDEF, Nigerian Governors' Forum, Northern Governors' Forum, Peter Obi, Shehu Sani are among those who have shown outrage at the carnage. The Pope and Amnesty International (AI) have cried out. AI has a long history of criticising the military for what it describes as human rights abuses, but in the aftermath of the Christmas killings in Plateau, the country director of AI, Isa Sanusi, is going a step further to ask for a probe into the activities of the military. "The Nigerian authorities must investigate the inexcusable security lapses that allowed the horrific killing of over 140 people by gunmen across over 20 villages... Our investigation shows that the gunmen were on rampage of killing and destruction for more than 48 hours, moving from one village to another," said Sanusi.

A few days after the attacks, Ayoola, former commander of Operation Safe Haven, the very security organisation that was put in place to prevent terrorist attacks on the Plateau, was on Arise TV suggesting that some elements in the military are more loyal to the terrorists than the country. He should know. Ayoola said in the interview that he had submitted a detailed report to the military





destructions caused by wildfires and the following month, Joe Biden was in Florida to survey destruction from Hurricane Idalia and comfort victims. The essence of these visits is to show compassion and empathy, which is the number one quality of a good leader. Just two months ago, terrorists crossed over from the Gaza Strip and killed over 220 people in Israel. Pronto! Prime Minister Netanyahu declared war against the terrorists and today, bombs are falling on Gaza. But in Nigeria, terrorists from the same ancestry and with the same ideological bent have been killing thousands of people of Plateau, Benue and Southern Kaduna for years now in a well-organized pogrom designed to seize their lands, yet no Nigerian leader has shown any capacity and

political will to bring justice to them. On the day of the attacks – October 7 – Netanyahu addressed his nation and promised to dismantle Hamas from power and destroy their military capabilities.

The world has been watching with both admiration and anger as Israel's Defence Force is pummeling Gaza. Leadership is everything. Those who trenchantly criticised Buhari for appearing soft on terrorists because he is of same ancestry as them will need to come up with new explanations on why the Tinubu administration is not acting differently. The images of Plateau women rolling on the floor, crying and wailing over their misfortunes, and the men fleeing their villages with their mattresses and household items are too heart-wrenching for me. The sufferings of the vulnerable members of our communities cut me to the quick.

On December 5, the Nigerian military mistakenly dropped two bombs on the people of Tudun Biri in Kaduna State. Defence Headquarters later explained that the people were mistaken for terrorists. On December 24, terrorists invaded 20 villages in Plateau state and murdered over 150 people. The same Defence Headquarters explained that they couldn't launch counterattacks to repel the attackers because of bad terrain. What more excuses should we expect? The shame of a country!

authorities on this before his retirement a few years ago. The police authorities have also come under severe criticism for their tardiness and inability to secure the safety of the people. Nigerians are also venting their anger on President Bola Tinubu for hunkering down in his Lagos home, enjoying the holidays and refusing to visit Plateau state to express solidarity and compassion. Although the president has dispatched Vice-President Shettima and the National Security Adviser, Nuhu Ribadu, to Jos to meet with Plateau leaders, that is not enough to assuage frayed nerves. Some commentators are quick to liken his response to that of President Muhammadu Buhari who only issued sympathy statements and sent Vice-President Yemi Osinbajo on countless condolence visits. Why are US presidents eager to jump into Airforce One to fly to disaster areas, visit with local officials and offer words of comfort to affected communities but our own commanders-in-chief do not care as much when disaster strikes? In the last two years, President Biden has visited over half a dozen cities to assess damage and comfort the hurt. In September 2021, he flew down to New York and New Jersey to survey damage from Hurricane Ida. In January 2023, he went to California to the damage from a series of devastating storms that slammed the western part of the country, forcing residents to flee mudslides and rising floodwaters. In May 2023, he was in Utah and offered federal assistance to aid recovery efforts in those affected by flooding. In August, the president travelled 13 hours to Hawaii to tour

