

THE SPIRAL OF VIOLENCE IN PLATEAU STATE



The authorities must bring the perpetrators of the violence to justice

Following the latest violence that claimed dozens of lives in Plateau State, the Sultan of Sokoto, Muhammad Sa'ad Abubakar, has raised critical questions on intelligence gathering in the country. "Why can't we be pro-active and stop such attacks before they happen? Can anybody tell me that nobody knew that such attacks were coming?" the Sultan, a retired Brigadier General of the Nigerian Army, asked. "In various places, whether it is Sokoto, Birnin-Kebbi, Kaduna, or anywhere, have we lost our sense of gathering information to avert any of such heinous

crimes? We must ask our governments to up the game because these bandits are always a step ahead".

It is difficult to fault the conclusion by the Sultan that criminals seem far ahead of the security agencies, especially as the unrelenting violence in Plateau State slides into chaos and anarchy. On Christmas eve, almost 200 people were killed across several communities in Bokkos, Barkin Ladi and Mangu local governments in what has become a never-ending spiral of revenge killings. The assailants targeted 17 communities in senseless and unprovoked attacks, and burning down



violence after the damage had been done. Besides, some have been implicated in the past for taking sides. Even community leaders as well as political and religious leaders who ordinarily should help in bringing peace and order are mostly often the ones leading the rhetoric of hate which fuels the cycle of violence.

Like his predecessors, President Bola Tinubu has made the usual feeble statement about

houses. "As I am talking to you, in Mangū local government alone, we buried 15 people. As of this morning, in Bokkos, we are counting not less than 100 corpses. I am yet to take stock of (the deaths in) Barkin Ladi," Governor Caleb Mutfwang said in a broadcast to the state on Monday. "It has been a very terrifying Christmas for us here in Plateau."

Since 2001, the once peaceful Plateau State with a glorious climate has been embroiled in ruinous and costly communal clashes that have consumed thousands of lives and displaced hundreds of thousands. The real concern is that the violence has the imprimatur of savagery and shows no promise of abating since the combatants have refused to find common grounds for peace. Meanwhile, it is scandalous that despite the rising body count over the years, not a single person has been successfully prosecuted and convicted for the several murders that have traces of a pogrom. Failure to apprehend and prosecute the perpetrators of the heinous crimes seems to encourage the propensity for killing innocent people as means of redressing perceived grievances. Communal clashes and reprisal killings over scarce grazing land and water resources have plagued the North central zone of the country for decades. Benue and Nasarawa States are also impacted badly by cattle grazing and bloody disputes between herders and farmers, and in the process laying waste the country's food basket. Government effort at both the federal and state in resolving the crisis has also been half-hearted. Nor have security forces provided much cheer as they often arrive scenes of

'bringing the culprits to book', but the people of Plateau are not putting much faith in his words. Yet, whether the federal government understands it or not, violence in Plateau State now constitutes one of Nigeria's major security threats. As we have repeatedly canvassed on this page, the only sustainable solution to the persistent violence on the Plateau lies in addressing headlong the problem of open grazing. Many countries in Africa like Botswana, South Africa, Mozambique, Kenya and Ethiopia have long embraced ranching and it is paying off. It is the trend across the world. But there are also age-long emotional issues of 'Settlers' and 'Indigenes' that require political sagacity to resolve by all critical stakeholders.

Above all, it is our recommendation that authorities at both the federal and state must bring to justice all those who use unlawful means to settle scores in several theatres across the country even as they make efforts to resolve the fundamental issues that spark violence.

