



Insecurity in Nigeria – A Call for Urgent Collaborative Effort

PRESS RELEASE

Time of Release: Immediate

The West Africa Network for Peacebuilding on behalf of its 500 member organisations spread across the 15 member states of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) expresses deepest concern and apprehension at the growing insecurity in Nigeria that is heightened by the current terrorist activities of Boko Haram.

We have monitored an escalation of acts of terrorist attacks carried out by Boko Haram with new targets bringing to the fore a new dimension through its shift of attacks from security operatives and government institutions/facilities to the bombing and attack on places of worships, banks, businesses in the Northern part of Nigeria. Boko Haram has also spread its operations beyond the North Eastern axis to the North Central and North Western zones of Nigeria. Since the beginning of December, the group has exponentially increased its attacks and terrorism operations beyond Borno and Bauchi to Adamawa, Yobe, Niger and Gombe States with reported casualty figures of over a hundred persons dead and more than three hundred persons injured surpassing the number of recorded casualties in these areas between January and November of 2011. Understandably, this has raised a new level of anxiety and panic among Nigerians given the new wave of boldness and violence perpetuated by this sect in these areas with threats of spreading to other states in the North and the southern parts of Nigeria.

The sect is also alleged to have issued a three day ultimatum to all Christians/southerners to leave the northern region of Nigeria. Panic has gripped southerners at the Northern part of Nigeria as many southerners have been reported to be relocating to the south.

Implications to Peace and Security in Nigeria:

President Goodluck Jonathan in his Christmas message commiserated with the victims of the attack of St. Theresa's church at Madalla, stated that Nigerians should see the current security challenge as a burden on the country. The government has also gone ahead to declare a state of emergency in 15 local governments of the four states in Borno, Yobe, Plateau and Niger States considered as flash points of the current insecurity in the country.

However, this has received mixed reactions from Nigerians who view government's response as inadequate, reactionary and a threat to the complete disintegration/civil war of the Nigerian State.

The President of the Christian Association of Nigeria, has warned that the inability of Nigerian security to address the terrorist operations of Boko Haram on Southern Christians as well as their ultimatum to Southerners to leave the North means that the Christian community are being forced to defend themselves by whatever means as the situation is degenerating into a possible muslim-christian war. He alluded that the indices points to a possible revisit of the civil war in Nigeria as the same circumstances played out prior to the Nigerian/Biafra civil war of 1967 – 1970.

Already the Egbesu Mitighter Fraternity, a militia group in the South South region has carried out its threat of reappraisal by bombing an Islamic school in Delta state. Southern youths at Warri have also been reported to attack Hausa/Fulanis living at Sapele which has led to a new mass movement out of the south by northerners residing at Asaba and Onitsha in Delta and Anambra States for fear of further reprisal attacks.

The insecurity is made worse by the President's recent pronouncement that some members of his cabinet as well as the security forces and legislatures are accomplices to the sect. His statement indicated the government's challenge in effectively addressing the terrorist activities of the sect due to the limited capacity of the police.

WANEP's concerns on the current situation:

WANEP expresses deep concern on the growing insecurity spreading across Nigeria which not only portends grave danger to the peaceful coexistence of the Nigerian people and the stability of the country but also to the entire ECOWAS sub region. Our concerns are on the basis of the following:

1. The shift towards soft targets of attacks by the Boko Haram sect especially innocent Christians is reinforcing the deepening divide between Muslims and Christians and also creating the perception as well as raising a potential threat of a Christian/Muslim Conflict of a national scale
2. The seeming government's security challenge and inability of arresting the growing terrorist operations of the Boko Haram Sect with a sense of helplessness in view of the government's claim that the sect has supporters who have infiltrated the government
3. The mass movement of southerners out of the North and Northerners from the south demonstrating very sadly the increasing divide between the southern and northern regions of Nigeria.

4. The confrontational statements attributed to religious leaderships and their complacency on the operations of the sect rather than reaching out with voices of reason for dialogue and overcoming hatred at a time of propaganda and rumours of a possible civil war in Nigeria.
5. The continued 'silence' of ECOWAS to the growing insecurity in Nigeria which is a threat to peace and security in the sub region.
6. The reported linkages of the sect to international terrorist groups such as Al Qaida
7. The increasing pronouncements and counter threats by regional militia groups such as the Egbesu Boys, the Odua People's Congress and the Movement for the Actualisation of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB)

WANEP is preoccupied with the unfolding tragedy and urgently calls for the following:

- ⊕ That more than ever before, Religious Leaders in Nigeria particularly Muslim and Christian Leaders should reach out to one another with a new sense of purpose for unity, love for humanity and peace. In this regard, Religious leaders should go beyond making solidarity visits to the president and engaging the media with statements that mitigate tensions and anxiety and work collectively and explore the opportunities for dialogue; the only means towards finding a sustainable solution to the growing religious crises in the country.
- ⊕ The Federal Government should be firm and have the courage/political will to prosecute any political office holder indicted as a supporter or accomplice to the Boko Haram sect.
- ⊕ Within the context of the Responsibility to Protect, the Federal Government of Nigeria must take the necessary steps in a rapid improvement in the coordination of Security for the protection of civilians including seeking international support for such protection to be effected in a timely manner.
- ⊕ The Institutions of the Federal Republic with a mandate to promote peace should take the leadership in the design of dialogue and joint problem solving approaches that should engage various levels of ethnic leaderships and groups in the country.
- ⊕ Nigerian government should create platforms for effective government-civil society collaborations to address the root and proximate causes of insecurity in Nigeria.
- ⊕ A comprehensive program on arms control with a view to managing proliferation of arms and production of locally made arms in Nigeria.
- ⊕ Finally, WANEP recommends a strong sense of solidarity and support of the governments and peoples of the Economic Community of West African States to the Government and people of Nigeria to give meaning to the ECOWAS vision, principles and values of a West Africa sub-region and ECOWAS of the people.