

NIGERIA: UNREST IN LAGOS

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The Context

After a year of relative calm, ethnic conflict suddenly escalated in Lagos on 15 October 2000 in the Ajegunle - Ajeromi Ifelodun local government area of the city. The Red Cross estimates that some 400 people were killed and hundreds injured, while some 17,500 people mostly from the Hausa community took refuge in the 4 military barracks within Lagos. Over 60 homes were burned down, countless shanty dwellings were destroyed, 170 vehicles including fuel tankers were set on fire, the main market of Ajegunle was razed and many more properties and business were destroyed. Commercial activity, already affected by fuel shortages, was severely disrupted. A dusk to dawn curfew was imposed in the area. In the absence of adequate security and services for the affected area, the military had used trailer transport to take the people to the military refuges provided. The military barracks did not provide shelter so the displaced had to sleep in the open. Joint military and police patrols were deployed to return security to the area.

Latest Events

The situation remained tense for two weeks during which reports of disturbances in other Hausa and mixed settlements in Lagos city and in Minna, the capital of Niger State, contributed to the general state of insecurity. Most of the violence had stopped by 18 October. While the State Government did provide some food relief to those sheltered in refuges, assistance was for the most part slow in arriving and being distributed.

The number of those taking refuge started reducing during the week of 23 October, and currently only some 100 families remain, primarily those whose homes are destroyed and who can not find alternative arrangements. The majority of those taking refuge have returned to their home area but have relocated within the area for collective safety. An unknown number of families moved north to resettle in their traditional homelands while others who had livelihoods outside the affected area relocated to other parts of the city. The situation is now quiet, but it is impossible to gauge the level of resentment and general disaffection between factions. There have been tributes paid for the actions of opposing communities in coming to the aid of those under attack and these are positive signs that peace can be secured.

Red Cross/Red Crescent action

- CHF 75,000 was released from the Federation's Disaster Relief Emergency Fund (DREF) to start the assistance operation.
- The Nigerian Red Cross Society (NRCS) management and 100 volunteers from Lagos State Branch were mobilised and deployed as Emergency Teams to give rescue and relief assistance from 16 October through 1 November when the operation was terminated. The Emergency Teams were able to work freely and without the military escorts offered. Operating with 5 vehicles, they evacuated or gave first aid to over 400 wounded people. Three women in advanced stages of pregnancy were assisted with urgent transportation to hospital.
- ICRC provided 5 medical kits for use by the General and other local hospitals to which people have been brought for treatment.
- The NRCS Acting Secretary General (ASG) successfully negotiated with the State authorities to overcome problems of refusals of treatment by the General Hospital and obtained necessary drugs from the Government.
- The Emergency teams working with the military camp commanders maintained a register of all people taking refuge and those leaving the camp.
- Four 5,000 litre water tanks were purchased and placed in the military barracks. 3,000 buckets and 5,000 mats were distributed from NRCS emergency stocks. 360 bags of garri, 900 of rice, 90 bags of beans, and 225 litres of vegetable oil were pre-packaged into family rations and distributed.
- A further 3,000 buckets, 5,000 cups, 5,000 blankets and 5,000 tablets of soap were drawn from emergency ICRC stocks and distributed.
- Due to the unreliable local government water supply it was necessary to provide 15,000 litres of water per day using Red Cross contracted water tankers.
- Shelter was also erected within the barracks in close coordination with military commanders.
- There was a daily meeting held with the Emergency Team Co-ordinator, NRCS ASG and the ICRC and Federation Head of Delegation's to co-ordinate the response and to monitor developments.
- A total of 14,127 people were given direct relief material assistance during the operation.

Outstanding needs

CHF 34,000 are required to cover the initial (underestimated) costs of the operation, including relief items and replacement of NRCS emergency stocks.

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