

NIGERIA: UNREST IN LAGOS

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The Situation

The tensions associated with the adoption of Sharia law supported by the Hausa ethnic people of the northern states, the growing militancy and vigilante activity of the OPC Yoruba political organisation, and general socio/economic/political problems have been increasing in Lagos.

The situation first exploded almost a year ago when in December 1999 there was a significant outbreak of violence between the Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo communities of the Mile 12 area of Lagos in which some 50 people were killed and many homes and properties destroyed. More recently the militant wing of the OPC Yoruba political party has been engaged in vigilante activity which they claimed was to protect the Yoruba community and root out lawlessness and violence. Over 30 OPC members have been arrested, with some casualties as a result of the police response. The violence has extended to summary executions, and claimed non-Yoruba victims.

Latest Events

The situation suddenly deteriorated on Sunday 15 October when an OPC vigilante killing of a Hausa person in the area of Ajegunle and Ipaja suburbs of Lagos reportedly occurred. The violence quickly escalated to the wider area of Boundary market, Ijora-Badiya, Ojo and Ajegunle suburbs when some 30 people were estimated to have been killed and hundreds injured. Many household and business properties were destroyed and vehicular traffic became a target also for fire bombing. A dusk to dawn curfew was imposed in the area.

On Tuesday 17 October, the Army and Navy Barracks became a refuge for some 10,000 Hausa people fleeing the violence which continued to escalate throughout the day. With the severely stretched police operation unable to contain the situation, the military authorities continued to provide truck transport to evacuate Hausa people from the conflict area to neighbouring military barracks. The death toll rose to an estimated figure of 100 with over 1,000 injured. Those injured were reluctant to be admitted to hospital after initial first aid treatment due to a fear of prosecution.

On Wednesday, 18 October, the unrest spread to other areas of Lagos, including Lagos Island and the mainland, and tension increased. Transportation and commercial activities have been seriously disrupted with many businesses closed. The number of civilians taking refuge in the three military barracks has risen to over 15,000 people. Shelter in the barracks is insufficient, so the displaced sleep in the open. Water, sanitation, food and clothing are all of a critical concern. The death toll is now put at 250. Joint

military and police patrols have been introduced and the area curfew remains in force. It is feared that the situation could escalate further if northerners respond to calls to come to the assistance of the Hausa minority in the city.

Red Cross/Red Crescent action:

- Nigerian Red Cross staff and volunteers from the Lagos State Branch were quickly mobilised and deployed as Emergency Teams on Monday morning. The initial problems of gaining access to the affected area were overcome and it was possible for the Emergency Teams to work freely and without the military escort offered. Operating with five vehicles, 63 seriously injured people were evacuated to the General Hospital, and scores of people were provided with first aid in the Barracks refuges.
- The ICRC provided five medical kits for use by the general and other local hospitals to treat those injured.
- The NRCS Acting Secretary General (ASG) successfully negotiated with state authorities to resolve problems when the General Hospital refused to provide treatment.
- Emergency teams are continuing to monitor the situation, providing evacuation to hospitals, first aid, and registering those taking refuge in military barracks. A meeting with the government officials is to be held to specify food, shelter and sanitation needs, and security/crowd control arrangements in order to facilitate distributions.
- Four 5,000 litre water tanks are being purchased by ICRC for placement in the military barracks and 3,000 buckets and 5,000 cups have been drawn from emergency stocks to assist water distribution to those in the barracks. The Lagos State has provided a water tanker to transport the water. Shelter is being constructed from framework and plastic sheeting within the barracks, in collaboration with military commanders. Daily meetings are being held with the Emergency Team Co-ordinator, the NRCS, the ICRC, and the Federation to determine the needed response and to monitor developments.

Needs:

The situation remains fluid, and it remains unclear whether the violence will be contained or will escalate further to other areas of Lagos or beyond, and what the Government capacity is to respond adequately. A total of 15,000 people are now estimated to be seeking protection and shelter in military barracks. They are likely to remain in these refuges for an indeterminate stay. Until the Government communicates its planned response, the military confirms that security/control can be assured, and cooking facilities can be organised for possible dry ration distributions, it will not be possible to draw up a comprehensive plan of action for the more immediate response.

Depending on how the situation evolves, the NRCS is in a position to quickly organise the distribution of relief materials from the following existing stocks of emergency items: 3 rolls of plastic sheeting, 3,000 cooking pots. Preparations have also been undertaken to distribute 3,000 dry food family rations consisting of 15 kg of rice, 6 kg of garri, 3 kg of red beans, and 1.5 litres of cooking oil. This plan is based on the needs assessments carried out so far which indicates that the people who have rushed to the refuges without any belongings, are in need of food and shelter.

Distributions from the emergency stocks requires new funding and donor support. Following are the needs to replenish basic relief items released from emergency stocks as well as the proposed distributions of food materials and other needs:

- 3,000 water buckets
- 45 mt of rice
- 18 mt of garri
- 9 mt of beans
- 4,500 litres of cooking oil

- Transportation
- Volunteers Subsistence
- Administrative/Management costs

Total approximate cost of the proposed relief response: CHF 99,000.

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