

'Accident Is The major Cause Of Violent Deaths In Nigeria'

Coordinator, *Nigeriawatch*, a research publication monitoring violent-related deaths in West African countries, Prof. Marc-Antoine Pérouse de Montclos in this interview makes insightful recommendations on how to overcome the security challenges of the country such as frequent bomb explosions and bloody ethnic/religious clashes.

By Bankole Shakirudeen Adeshina

WHAT is your *Nigeriawatch* initiative all about?

Nigerians in the Diaspora want to keep abreast with the latest in their country; they want to know more about the level of crime in the country, where and when it happens. So, through the *Nigeriawatch* initiative, I want them to know where the violence is and whether it is increasing or decreasing.

So, the *Nigeriawatch* initiative is specifically focusing on violence relating to crime. It started in 2006 and has led to multiple discoveries about crime related violence in Nigeria, through researches and visits to various violence centers across the country.

Now, the pattern of violence that is prevalent here is what you will find in many parts of the developing countries of the world. Even in Kenya, where I spent two years on assignment, like Nigeria, when it comes to violence there, the first risk is road accident. So, when it comes to public safety, this would give you preview on what should be prioritised on the agenda of the government and other public and private agencies dealing in public safety and security.

For instance, we got figure from the Federal Road Safety Corps that between 8,000 and 10,000 people die in road accident yearly in Nigeria. However, statistically, even at the high population of Nigeria, 10,000



Mac-Anthonie

people dying on road accident is a lot of people and too much. **How do you think the figure can be pruned down?**

Our major interest is to keep the tracks of the event and publish the statistics as at when due. We do hope that it would help people in government and other relevant agencies to make informed decisions about social security and safety. Basically, we intend to be keeping the tracks because for the past 50 years of Nigeria's independence,

there has not been a regular statistical data of violent deaths and criminally intended ones in the country.

I have lived in Abuja for the past 20 years and each time there is a talk on crime in Nigeria, people always feel it is on the rise. So, that is what we intend to check. And for the last three years, it has been reducing although it could increase in the near future. But if I have data about 250,000 violent deaths, it means it is a big data and I can say from the scientific point of view that violent

death is real and must be prevented. And when it comes to the rate, not the absolute numbers of deaths are represented, compared to the entire population.

If you look at the absolute numbers, for instance, Lagos State is highly populated. You will always think Lagos is more dangerous because the number of deaths that would be recorded would be more than in any other state.

For instance, you realise that some states in the middle belt are very dangerous. They are not that populated so they have lower record of deaths compared to Lagos. But, when you compare the statistics with their population, you will find out that they are dangerous.

Did you say poor standard of roads is a major contributory factor to violent deaths in Nigeria?

Yes, poor standard of roads, reckless driving and poor state of the vehicles. But there has been a lot of improvement in Lagos, for instance, compared to 20 years ago. Oshodi bus stop is a typical example of the befitting facelift that has happened to Lagos. When I got there recently, I just couldn't believe what I saw. Also, I was there when the government inaugurated the Third Mainland Bridge in 1991 and could see the trend of things.

Another issue is that there has been mass exodus of people from rural areas to Lagos owing to social inequity like abject poverty, especially in the North and in some parts of the Middle Belt. I am not the one reeling out this statistics but there are statistics on the level of poverty in Nigeria. And we know that the poorest population in Nigeria is in some parts of middle belt and the North like Katsina State. It is not in the Niger Delta region like we have some people claiming. The poorest part of the country in terms of not only the money you get, but also access to health service, education, infrastructures lies between North and the Middle Belt.

In 2005, I was in Marabi, a border town between Nigeria and Niger Republic and saw Doctors Without

Borders running a relief centre there because of a looming famine in Nigeria. I went round to conduct a research only to realise that one third of the children in the centre were coming from Katsina State. By the way, the late President Yar'Adua was still the Governor of the state then.

But is it not an irony that despite the long dominance of the political space in the country by northerners, poverty seems to be more prevalent in their domain?

It is not about where the governor or the president comes from; it is about the willingness to tackle poverty. Besides, I think your question is tilting towards whom I am going to vote for in the next election and funny enough, I don't know yet.

In the course of your research, what are the core indices you have come about so far?

NigeriaWatch is not a human rights organisation but a research group. The report does not issue recommendations but only highlights the main findings. As in 2006-2007, the main causes of death due to public violence are in order of importance accidents, crime, economic issues, political clashes and ethno-religious fighting. It is based on data collated between June 1, 2006 and May 31, 2008.

In May 2008, 1,674 incidents were reported, resulting in 6,259 deaths, as against 1,753 and 6,773 during the same period a year before. Most incidents produce a small number of casualties.

Nigerian security forces still contribute substantially to violence. The more they intervene, the bloodier the fighting. Yet violence is decreasing, a trend that obviously impacts on the number of killings by the security forces.

Our findings are different from other studies that are based on a shorter period of time and do not include accidents. According to the Small Arms Survey in Geneva, the most common violence in Nigeria from December 2006 to March 2007 was crime, followed by politico-electoral clashes and oil-related conflicts.