

Nigeria Struggles to Control Violence



From VOA Learning English, welcome to As It Is.

Hello, I'm Steve Ember.

Today, from Nigeria, government attempts to control violence by the Islamist militant group Boko Haram...and pardons to militants who stop fighting in the country's north. And it's the anniversary of the birth of the writer who created Double-O-Seven, otherwise known as

"Bond. James Bond."

The president of Nigeria recently announced deployment of thousands of troops to the country's north. The action is part of an effort to control violence by supporters of the Islamist militant group Boko Haram. Nigerian officials reported that the military is holding more than 200 suspected Boko Haram militants. Milagros Ardin has our story.

Boko Haram is based in Borno. It has fought the government since 2009. The group's current leader released a video claiming responsibility for recent attacks in the towns of Baga and Bama. He said the group would start kidnapping people as part of the way it operates. Lieutenant Colonel Sagir Musa is a spokesman for the Joint Military Task Force in Borno state.

"There is literally a resurgence of terrorist activities in Borno State, mostly in the rural areas. We have observed the resurgence and where it is coming from and necessary measures are on and soon it will be stopped."

Yet, some say it is Boko Haram that is gaining the upper hand. They say people are less likely to cooperate with the government because of its abuses against civilians and Boko Haram detainees. The abuse is helping Boko Haram find new members. A retired soldier in the city of Maiduguri says the militants have been moving into the area.

The Nigeria expert for the Jamestown Foundation in Washington, DC says militants have been training in the country. Jacob Zenn said they do this without much fear of being hunted by local police. He says that is the result of changing its operation to avoid government troops.

"It seems that Boko Haram has come under pressure in some of the major cities like Maiduguri and is actually realizing that it is preferable to operate in the rural areas where the government doesn't have too many forces. And there it can establish havens. It can train. It can keep hostages."

Boko Haram has only recently started kidnapping people. It says it is taking local women and children in reaction to the detention of the wives and children of its members by the government and security officials.

Local militant leader Abubakur Shekau said Boko Haram will kidnap more people. And [he] adds, if they can't see their women and children, then no one will be permitted to enjoy his family. God, he says, permits them to consider all those they capture as slaves. And, he tells security forces, if you think you can rescue them, then "we challenge you to try."

Even with these threats, rights groups criticize Nigeria's government. They say that in its effort to stop the violence, the government uses too much force and kills civilians. People who live in Baga say security forces burned

down thousands of homes after a soldier was killed by Boko Haram. The military has denied the accusation. President Jonathan said troops would be permitted to make arrests, take control of buildings used for terrorist purposes and detain people with illegal weapons. I'm Milagros Ardin.

You are listening to As It Is from VOA Learning English. I'm Steve Ember.

Business Opportunities for Ex-Militants...

Nigerians are now debating the possibility of giving pardons to militants who stop fighting in the country's north. Four years ago, the government began offering pardons to militants in the south. They were guaranteed safety in return for ending their violent ways.

Today, some former militants are opening small businesses and living peacefully in the Niger Delta area. But others are warning of more violence unless conditions improve.

Some Nigerian newspaper websites are asking readers if they believe that the government should offer amnesty to Boko Haram militants. On one website, the largest number of voters agreed with the statement, "No, they have killed innocents..."

But for many Nigerians, the idea of peace through pardons, or amnesty, has been tested with at least partial success in the Niger Delta. There, militants fought against the government and oil companies for several years.

Observers say the fighting in the Niger Delta was very different from the current Boko Haram conflict. Boko Haram says it is fighting for Islamic law and to free its jailed members. The Niger Delta militancy was a product of a popular movement calling for fair distribution of oil wealth.

But, some former militants in the Niger Delta say the amnesty program is preventing another rebellion. Thirty-year-old Epipade Kemepade was once responsible for passing out weapons to other militants. In 2009, he surrendered his gun in return for the promise of job training and a little more than 400 dollars a month.

Now he is a trained welder who operates his own business. He is also among 300 former militants promised new equipment a month ago for their businesses. But the equipment has not yet arrived.

Another ex-militant, Charles Efenedu, says he received business training after ending violence. He was told he could open a small food store when he completed the training. That was two years ago.

“I’m trying to work on a farm to succeed by myself because the federal government is not doing any good about our training. So we just sit at home doing nothing.”

In northern Nigeria, Boko Haram members have rejected the idea of accepting any pardon. They say the government should be asking for amnesty from them.

And, on a lighter note...

A "Shaken, Not Stirred" Birthday Anniversary...

May 28th is the anniversary of the birth of writer Ian Fleming. He was born in 1908. Fleming created the famous fictional British spy:

SEAN CONNERY: "Bond, James Bond."



Sean Connery, the original James Bond in poster for "Goldfinger"

James Bond – agent 007 -- has been saving the world from evil forces on movie screens since his first film, "Dr. No," in 1962. Bond is famous for his love of fast cars, beautiful women...

SEAN CONNERY (from "Goldfinger"): "Who are you?"

HONOR BLACKMAN: "My name is Pussy Galore."

SEAN CONNERY: "I must be dreaming."

...and many mechanical devices, some of them deadly.

The Bond character first appeared in the Ian Fleming book "Casino Royale," which was published in 1953. The movies continue today, with the next one expected in 2016. Ian Fleming died of a heart attack in 1964 at age 56. But he lived long enough to see actor Sean Connery play Bond in "Dr. No" and "From Russia with Love."

James Bond lovers like to say that the super-spy is a lot like his creator. Fleming, like Bond, served in British Naval intelligence. And also like Bond, he drank his Martinis...

SEAN CONNERY: "shaken, not stirred."

ADELE: "This is the end..."

And as Adele reminds us, from the opening of "Skyfall," the latest Bond thriller, it is definitely the end, at least for our program today. A reminder – for the latest world news, tune in VOA News at the top of the hour Universal Time, both on radio and on our web site. Thanks for joining us. The name's Ember. Steve Ember.