



Spaces for Youth Development and Social Change

Spaces for Change (S4C)

- October 9, 2012 | Press Statement -

Protect Nigerian Youths From Violent Attacks Now!

In two separate incidents in the last week, about 50 Nigerian youths lost their lives in the most gruesome and barbaric manner rarely seen elsewhere in the world. The grisly massacre of 46 polytechnic students in Mubi, Adamawa State and the lynching of four students of the University of Port Harcourt (UNIPORT) in Aluu Community, near Port Harcourt Rivers State, have highlighted the need for the Nigerian government to take the constitutional protection of the right to life, and other inalienable fundamental freedoms, more seriously. **Spaces for Change** condemns these two incidents in very strong terms, and urge for greater protection of the lives of young citizens across the country.

On Independence Day, 46 students were massacred in Mubi Polytechnic, Adamawa State when gunmen wearing military uniforms invaded the students' off campus hostels in the town under curfew. Eye witness accounts established that the murdered and the wounded were clubbed, stabbed or shot to death based on their tribal, ethnic and religious leanings. Several days after the killings, the victims' identities remain largely uncovered, just as the local media is replete with conflicting statistics of the number of casualties and the cause of the killings. The Mubi massacre occurred just days after parents were forced to withdraw their wards from the violence-ridden Maiduguri, Borno State after 2 students of the University of Maiduguri were brutally killed by unknown gun men.

Reminiscent of the barbarism witnessed in the Stone Age, four students, identified as Lloyd, Tekena, Ugonna and Chidiaka, aged between 18 -25, of the University of Port Harcourt were beaten to death and set ablaze by an irate mob on Sunday morning, (October 7, 2012) in Aluu, Ikwerre Local Government Area of Rivers State. Peeved by allegations that the four suspects allegedly stole laptops and phones, Aluu community leader, Alhaji Hassan Walewa allegedly sanctioned the cruel acts by the community youths. Video clips of the gruesome killings have gone viral on the internet, spurring a nationwide and global outrage, with majority of the reactions continuing to question Nigeria's commitment to protect the human rights of its citizens.

Particularly objectionable is that both the Aluu and Mubi incidents lasted for several hours without any rapid response mechanism or intervention by security forces. Majority of the wounded also died due to the delay in accessing emergency medical assistance. We are also deeply saddened that these escalating attacks are happening at a time "security" received the record highest resource allocation in the 2012 national budget.

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As the Cynthia Osokogu and the video-taped gang-rape of a young girl in Abia State vividly illustrate, the youth, especially young women have increasingly become targets of physical, sexual and psychological violence, threatened in their personal integrity and relationships, and denied means of livelihood, including access to education, work, housing and adequate health care. Our routine documentation of the new patterns of violent crimes in Nigeria show that an increasing number of young people across the country are irrepressibly being drafted into criminal behavior. With more than 35 percent of the population lacking education and employment, particularly in the rural areas, the dearth of economic opportunities contributes to the decision of youths to join criminal gangs and cult groups for temporary economic gain.

Senior officials of the Rivers State government told **Spaces for Change** that the State Governor, Mr. Rotimi Amaechi has ordered full scale investigation into this Aluu community mob action. **Spaces for Change** welcomes the Rivers State government's arrest of the Aluu community leader and 12 other persons in connection with the murder of four UNIPORT students. We continue to hope that the arrests will lead to meaningful investigations and conclusive fair trials that deliver justice to the victims' families.

We use this medium to ask the Nigerian government and the international community to recognize these attacks, especially the growing resort to jungle justice as evidence of rapidly eroding public confidence in the criminal administration of justice systems in Nigeria. Too many unresolved acts of criminality and thievery: fuel subsidy corruption, pension scams, oil theft, 3 Million US Dollars "sting operation", 16 million US Dollar power probe discoveries, among many others further erode the people's trust in the formal channels for redressing wrongs.

We wish to reiterate that Nigeria is a democratic country whose constitution invalidates the taking of another person's life. We therefore call upon all responsible institutions, particularly the police and the judiciary to swiftly identify and prosecute all perpetrators of these unacceptable acts. We specifically urge them to use these two cases to demonstrate their preparedness to combat criminality, fight impunity and take its human rights protection mandate more seriously.

Spaces for Change appreciates and supports efforts made by civil society organizations, virtual communities, the Rivers State Government and the selfless campaigners on the social media for the steps they are taking to ensure that such unacceptable acts are publicized and not repeated.

Established in May 2011, Spaces for Change (S4C) is a non-profit, human rights organization working to infuse human rights into social and economic decision-making processes and platforms in Nigeria. Using the human rights framework and youth-centered strategies, the organization creates spaces for the often-excluded young people, marginalized groups and communities to become active participants in public decision making, and strong advocates of social and economic justice.

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