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Nigerian archbishop urges president to take action

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LAGOS, Nigeria -- Archbishop John Olorunfemi Onaiyekan of Abuja urged Nigerian President Goodluck Jonathan to take bold steps to address the level of insecurity in the country.

Onaiyekan, former president of the Christian Association of Nigeria, spoke to journalists after a New Year's Eve bomb blast in his city and earlier violence and attacks in and around the city of Jos.

"What is expected of Jonathan's administration at the moment is clear, vivid and strict measures in tackling the continuous cases of bomb blasts in the country," the archbishop said.

He said that in dealing with issues of terrorism, politics should be separated from criminality. He added that suspects in terrorist acts are treated with kid gloves.

"If you bombed and killed people, that is criminal," he said. "If you carry bombs around and detonate them with the aim of killing and destroying not only persons ... but their properties, that is a criminal act that requires the prompt action in punishing the culprits."

In late December, Lagos Cardinal Anthony Olubunmi Okogie warned that if the current government fails to deal with perennial sectarian crises, Nigerians would be forced to pick up the gauntlet and defend themselves.

"It is not right for a country reputed to be the most powerful nation in Africa, parading the strongest military might, to be held by the jugular by a faceless group of individuals. Where, then, is the security of this country? Who are members of this group?" the cardinal said Dec. 29 after more killings.

"My advice to the president is for him to show now that there is a government in place in this country by taking the bull by the horn," he said.

"Were you in this country during the civil war?" he asked, adding, "If you were, you will understand what I am trying to talk about."

Okogie was among the few military chaplains at the frontlines of the 1967-70 Nigerian civil war.

On Dec. 28, prominent Christian and Muslim leaders accused politicians who want to sabotage the April national and local elections of instigating the recent violence.

Members of the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, who visited Nigeria after several instances of violence in the past several years, acknowledged that nonreligious issues -- the economy, jobs, ethnic rivalries and land ownership -- come into play. In a report issued last April, the commission said Nigeria's political leaders are unable to effectively resolve conflicts that transcend both socio-economic and religious issues.

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