

Terror Zone: Thirteen MPS urge peace talks with militia

Story by NATION Team
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Thirteen MPs yesterday asked the Government to step up security and stop the violence in Mt Elgon district that saw six people killed at the weekend. At the same time, Parliament will today interrupt its normal business to discuss the violence that has raged on for six months and claimed a total of 140 lives. These developments came as four schools were closed yesterday because of insecurity.

National Assembly Speaker Francis ole Kaparo Tuesday allowed a request by Changamwe MP Ramadhan Kajembe who wanted the killings discussed as a matter of national importance.



A man nurses his wounds sustained from the trouble-hit Mt Elgon area.

Mr Kajembe, who chairs Parliament's departmental committee on security, made the request as it emerged that about 2,000 students in three primary and one secondary schools near the district headquarters of Kapsokwony had been sent home two days before the end of the term due to rising tension in the disputed Chebyuk settlement scheme.

And the 13 MPs, who spoke at Parliament Buildings, also asked the Government to hold talks with the Sabaot Land Defence Forces militiamen believed to be behind the attacks. They also demanded that provincial administrators, police and lands officials in the area be transferred to promote reconciliation.

Nominated Narc MP Franklin Bett, who read the statement on behalf of his 13 colleagues, asked President Kibaki to personally take over efforts to restore peace in the area by visiting Mt Elgon and promoting talks between religious and community leaders.

Mt Elgon district is in Western Province but the Rift Valley MPs said those affected by the land clashes were their people.

In fresh attacks on Monday night, arsonists burnt down four shops at Kopsiro shopping centre as the violence spread, and residents fled to the safety of neighbouring towns in Bungoma District.

Rupulsed attackers

The four shops were located less than a kilometre from Kopsiro DO's office.

The killing of six people a day earlier occurred less than a kilometre from Kapsokwony Town where a police station and the district commissioner's residence are located.

Area police chief David Makokha yesterday said security officers repulsed the attackers who had invaded the area by firing several shots in the air.

Displaced families have been fleeing to Kimilili constituency as provincial administration officials transported religious leaders from Mt Elgon to Kakamega town for peace talks.

And in Parliament, Mr Kajembe said many lives and property had been lost due to the attacks by gangs in Kapsokwony, Kopsiro and neighbouring divisions.

But his plea to have the matter debated yesterday was not accepted as he failed to comply with another parliamentary rule which demands that notices of motions of adjournment be lodged with the Speaker at least two hours before the start of a sitting.

Although Mr Kaparo said the MP's request was valid and appropriate, it had been raised barely 20 minutes before the beginning of the afternoon sitting.

"But that notwithstanding, the matter is very important. I ask the member to raise the matter tomorrow morning (today) after question time, and allow discussion on it to take two and a half hours," Mr Kaparo said, as his order won instantaneous foot-thumping from both sides of the House.

With that, Mr Kajembe has only one task this morning; to have at least 15 members standing up to support his request. The House departmental committee on security, which Mr Kajembe heads, has 11 members from the Government and Opposition benches.

Mr Kaparo reminded members of the need to stick to the Standing Orders. "Ample notice allows the Speaker to alert the minister in whose docket the matter to be discussed belongs," he said

He told the House that Eldoret North MP William Ruto had also notified him of a similar motion.

The rule which Mr Kajembe used to ask Parliament to discuss the Mt Elgon crisis allows MPs to either extend or interrupt proceedings to debate matters of national importance.

The provision allows ministers to listen to members' concerns so as to take appropriate action. Going by this rule, Internal Security minister John Michuki will be required to attend today's session and listen to members concerns and take steps to address them.

Notices of motion enable MPs to speak out on issues of national importance and then make recommendations.

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