

Gov't Warns Against Inflaming Ethnic Tension

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Information Minister Lewis Browne

The Government of Liberia has taken strong exception to accusations raised by some individuals that it has embarked on “witch-hunting” against citizens of Grand Gedeh through its recently issued public alert for 10 persons, most of who were reportedly from Grand Gedeh, to immediately report to the authorities for questioning regarding crisis at the Liberia-Ivory Coast border.

“The Government emphasizes that its action to issue an alert for ten persons is well-intentioned; and not about a particular ethnic group. The alert as issued is rather about consolidating peace in the sub-region and securing Liberia’s border, since the government gets no incentive by going after its citizens without any security intelligence,” the press release from the Ministry of Information, Culture and Tourism noted.

The government’s objection to the alleged ethnic baiting by “those putting ethnic face on the security measures” follows harsh accusations in some quarters that the government was embarking on an overzealous ethnic-based dragnet to haul individuals from Grand Gedeh county in for questioning without “proper investigation and evidence” to validate the government’s classifying these individuals as suspects.

It can be recalled that late last week, the government issued an alert for 10 persons who were suspected of having involvement in the bloody cross-border raids which resulted in the deaths of 7 UN peacekeepers and a number of civilians. The incident resulted in the government of Liberia closing its border with Ivory Coast and sending military reinforcement to the area to squelch the developing border crisis.

Reacting to the government’s list of suspect, Grand Gedeh County Representative, Alex Chersia Grant, in a release sent to the media, expressed deep concerns over what he termed “widely-held perceptions and accusations that the people of Grand Gedeh were the masterminds behind the recent mercenary attacks.”

Cautioning that the government’s action to simply call individuals, who were predominately from Grand Gedeh in for questioning, only to release them for lack of evidence, was “akin to witch-hunting and a violation of their fundamental human and constitutional rights,” Representative Grant said care must therefore be taken to avoid citizens from Grand Gedeh being “wrongfully arrested, maligned and victimized.”

However, in a strongly worded press release, the government denounced what it termed “attempts by certain individuals to politicize and ethnicize the Government’s alert.”

“The Government therefore warns in a very serious tone those putting ethnic face on the security measures being taken to secure Liberia’s borders to desist as their actions have the propensity to ignite unnecessary ethnic sentiments in the body politic,” the released said.

Meanwhile, the release concluded, the Government is encouraging all to abide by the current security measures and call on those named in the alert to willingly turn themselves in to the police, as in the case with Abednego Zleh and Ofori Diah.

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