

Nigeria Police News

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Islamic authorities in the northern Nigerian city of Kano have told organisers of a planned protest by divorced women to cancel the event. The head of the Sharia police, or Hisbah, said the planned protest was an "embarrassment", and is "un-Islamic". The organisers have agreed to postpone their protest scheduled for 29 January. Women's rights activists say divorced women are often thrown out of their homes, lose custody of their children, and many end up destitute. The Director General of the Hisbah, Saidu Dukawa, said there were also security concerns over the protest. "We fear what could happen in the streets if there is a large gathering of people, it could get out of control," he told the BBC's Hausa Service. Large gatherings of people can be volatile in Nigeria, which has been rocked by violence between Muslims and Christians over the last 10 years. Quarrelling spouses He also said the idea of street protests was "un-Islamic" and "morally wrong". "Never in the history of Islam have women taken to the street to press for their demands," he said. The Hisbah were reported by local media to have said they feared the demonstration would "ridicule Kano in the eyes of the world". Kano is one of 12 northern Muslim-majority states governed by Sharia law. The Hisbah are in charge of policing the morals of Muslims to make sure they are "Sharia-compliant". They do not have the authority to ban the protest from going ahead, but told organisers they would report the demonstration to the police if they continued with it. One of their duties is to reconcile quarrelling spouses and prevent divorce. But divorce in polygamous northern Nigeria is very common.

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Dozens of men, some half-naked and barefoot, many with bruised faces, shuffled into the sprawling car park at the police headquarters in Lagos on a recent December evening. Hoards of reporters were standing by to fire questions at them. Each week the police brandish new criminals they have arrested to demonstrate how effectively they are fighting crime in Lagos. Lagos police chief, Marvel Apkoyibo: "It is very, very challenging. Violent crimes, carjacking and gang violence are just a few of the security challenges we face here." The tally that evening listed: 14 armed robbers arrested, five criminal suspects killed by police, nine guns seized - a customary daily record of police activity in Lagos. Over 1,000 criminal suspects had been hauled into Lagos police stations by the end of the week. Among those speaking to journalists that night was suspect Moshood Adeleke, 25, who cowered before the cameras as he explained how he stalked central Lagos, robbing people. "I used a jackknife to rob people and collected their cell phones and money." Another suspect wearing military fatigues, who claimed to be a dismissed army corporal, told journalists he extorted money from motorists in the chaotic Lagos traffic. After 30 minutes the suspects, many of them limping, were shepherded back to their cells. Lacking logistics, training, weapons - with no electronic finger-printing data of suspects and few surveillance cameras - the police force is unable to fight the rising tide of crime that continues to plague Lagos residents, an unnamed top security official told IRIN. "Crime here is like a category-five storm sweeping across the city," said resident Paul Nlekwa. Arms, ammunition and teargas canisters are all in short supply, the security official said. "We have been fighting well-armed robbers with our bare hands. We have limited vehicles, limited armoured personnel carriers and we lack every imaginable weapon." Police official and former police chief Muhammad

Abubakar told IRIN: "Only in Nigeria do policemen guard banks without wearing any body armour." The police budget for 2009 is a "woefully inadequate" US\$1.3 billion, according to national police chief Mike Okiro. "Nigeria's entire annual budget would be insufficient if we plan to fully equip police to combat crime in the country," he told legislators at a budget hearing in early January. As a result, working conditions for Lagos police "are among the worst even by West African standards," according to Innocent Chukwuma, head of the non-profit CLEEN Foundation, which promotes public safety and justice in Nigeria. "Less than 10 percent of police officers have official accommodation in barracks or privately rented apartments," she told IRIN. "Many others sleep in broken-down vehicles or vehicles they seize from people; others sleep in their offices." Some resort to bribes to get by. "We fuel our patrol vehicles by raising our own money from the public," revealed a sergeant and member of the elite anti-riot mobile force, who requested anonymity. "We buy almost everything ourselves; torches, even our belts and boots." Senior officers also expect junior officers to pay them a proportion of the bribe money they raise each day. "They must settle with us," he said. To make up for equipment and training shortfalls, some police officers are inclined to employ brute force, and routinely commit acts of torture, according to Human Rights Watch. CLEEN's Chukwuma said: "If you look at the range of weapons available to the police, what is supposed to be used as a last resort - the gun - is often used as first. In traffic situations or during riot control, you see them [police] brandishing AK-47s." According to Information Minister Dora Akunyili, the problem does not come down to numbers - with 370,000 officers the Nigerian police force is the largest on the continent, and equals one officer per 371 Nigerians, better than the 1:400 UN benchmark. A recruitment drive has attracted 40,000 new officers to posts every year since 2005. But the officers are not effectively deployed, officials say. Lagos, despite its size, has just 27,000 police officials, according to police spokesman Frank Mba. Another officer said many of these are deployed to protect public officials or do administrative work, leaving just half the force to tackle street crime. "We have enough policemen. We need to train, fund and equip the ones we already have, deploy them properly, and motivate them to do the work they are supposed to," Akunyili said. While the past years has seen accountability improve - up to 5,000 police officers have been dismissed for misconduct since 2000 and the police public complaints bureau has been revived - reform needs to go deeper, she said.

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Speaking at his maiden interactive session with high-ranking police officers at the Force Headquarters in Abuja recently, Mr. Ibrahim Lame, the Minister of Police Affairs, said that the "recruitment policy of [the present] Administration will ensure that only qualified and morally upright members of the public are recruited into the force." He vowed that the "police must cease to be a dumping ground" for all sorts characters. As worrisome as Lame's observations are, they are by no means new. Indeed, former Inspector-General of Police (IGP), Mr. Sunday Ehindero, had, a few years ago, shocked the nation with the very devastating disclosure that most of the persons recruited into the Nigeria Police between 2000 and 2004 were criminals. In the same vein, former President Olusegun Obasanjo had also, at about the same time, declared that many policemen were in the habit of loaning their weapons to armed robbers for use in their destructive operations. In fact, there have been reports of sustained, widespread collaborations of policemen with hoodlums in many

violent robbery incidents and many are known to have taken measures to shield these criminals from keeping a date with the law. We have a police force that is neither people-friendly nor committed to offering Nigerians adequate protection. Most of the time, policemen tend to give the impression that other Nigerians are nothing but preys to be devoured. The way they harass motorists and other category of citizens with the sole intention of making them part with their hard-earned money portray them as clearly hostile and misguided. Many of them are always drunk, harsh and menacing. Indeed, the quality of the persons in the Nigeria Police has gone a long way to render the Force very dysfunctional. There have been cases where policemen had robbed and killed motorists at lonely checkpoints on the highways once they discovered they were carry a lot of money. The case of one young man who had returned to the country from abroad and had taken shelter at a police station when it became dark only to be murdered and his belongings shared by the policemen before morning is still fresh in the memory. In many instances, innocent Nigerians are murdered by policemen and branded armed robbers. The minister must therefore realize that the criminals he is seeking to flush out may be greater in number than the non-criminals. Today, it is considered suicidal to give information to the police on the operations or hideouts of criminals. In most cases, such informants have had to pay with their lives as the criminals had visited soon afterwards to confront them for daring to report them to the police. Again, there have been reports of people who had gone to the police station to lodge complaints only for them to be made to become the accused in a matter they were complainants. Policemen arrest people on mostly non-existent offences, dump and forget them in detention camps even for years simply because they were unable or unwilling to buy their freedom. Indeed, to say that hardly any Nigerian trusts policemen again is to state the obvious. This is most unfortunate.