# **Troops told 'shoot to kill' in New Orleans**

**A detachment of 300 National Guard troops have landed in anarchic New Orleans with the authorisation to shoot and kill "hoodlums", Louisiana Governor Kathleen Blanco says.**

Thousands of troops have struggled to counter armed looters and help tens of thousands of refugees flee New Orleans, where chaos reigns three days after Hurricane Katrina.

Top officials have confirmed that the storm killed thousands of people and have made a desperate plea for help to restore order to New Orleans and the surrounding region.

"Three hundred of the Arkansas National Guard have landed in the city of New Orleans," Ms Blanco said.

"These troops are fresh back from Iraq, well trained, experienced, battle-tested and under my orders to restore order in the streets.

"They have M-16s and they are locked and loaded.

"These troops know how to shoot and kill and they are more than willing to do so if necessary and I expect they will."

Colonel Henry Whitehorn of the Louisiana State Police said the law and order situation in the city was "bad".

But he said anarchic conditions around the Superdome stadium and central business district where up to 20,000 refugees had been sheltering were "stabilising".

He admitted that a number of police officers who had lost everything in flooding after Hurricane Katrina had handed in their badges, unwilling to take the fight to looters.

### **'War zone'**

Four days after the hurricane hit, New Orleans was still plagued by gun battles and rapes, with gangs of looters and carjackers roving the streets as bodies were left lying by the roadside.

Many people have spent four days without proper food, water and sanitation and endured nights of lawless blackout.

Residents reported survivors dropping dead in shelters. Hospitals were evacuated after power ran out.

"This is a war zone," said Melissa Murray, 32, a Louisiana state corrections officer helping in the relief effort.

A National Guardsman was shot outside the Superdome and a shot was also fired at a Chinook helicopter taking part in the operation to move refugees out of the stadium, officials said.

Two children were reportedly raped at the stadium.

New Orleans Mayor Ray Nagin issued an urgent plea for help for up to 20,000 refugees stuck in the convention centre, which he said was "unsanitary and unsafe" and running out of supplies.

"This is a desperate SOS," Mr Nagin said in a statement released through CNN television.

Ms Blanco said up to 300,000 survivors might still be stuck in disaster areas in the state and at least 40,000 uniformed troops were needed for New Orleans alone.

Although no precise death toll was available, Ms Blanco and Louisiana Senator Mary Landrieu said several thousand people were believed to have been killed by Katrina.

### **'National disgrace'**

As US Congress was in the process of passing a $14 billion plan for emergency disaster relief, the head of New Orleans's emergency operations, Terry Ebbert, called the response effort "a national disgrace".

Mr Ebert said the Federal Emergency Management Agency had been in the city for three days "yet there is no command and control".

"We can send massive amounts of aid to tsunami victims but we can't bail out the city of New Orleans," he said.

Thomas Jessie, a 31-year-old roofer, vented his fear and anger after spending a night in the squalor of the convention centre with no National Guard nor Red Cross workers in sight.

"We got dead bodies sitting next to us for days. I feel like I am going to die. People are going to kill you for water," Mr Jessie said.

"This is America, I don't understand the lack of communications between the authorities and the people," he said. "It is disgusting, we feel we have been forgotten."

Officials said the floodwaters were to blame for slow progress.

"Let me emphasise, from the very beginning, and as we speak, rescue operations have continued and are continuing in full force," said Homeland Security Chief Michael Chertoff.

President George W Bush vowed "zero tolerance" for armed gangs and profiteers.

Mr Bush, criticised for his tardy response to the disaster, cranked up the Government's relief machinery and was to tour hurricane-damaged areas of Louisiana, Mississippi and Alabama on Friday.

He also tapped his father, former president George Bush Snr, and former president Bill Clinton to lead fundraising efforts for the victims of the hurricane.

The President also appealed for Americans to conserve car fuel for the next few weeks. But US petrol stations saw panic buying and lengthening queues.

--**AFP/Reuters**