

Ngoshe: 'I lost 3 children, husband in captivity' – Freed victim

From Hamisu Kabir Matazu,
Maiduguri

Freed victims of the **Ngoshe mass abduction in Gwoza Local Government Area** of Borno State have recounted their harrowing experiences while in captivity.

Terrorists had, on March 3, abducted more than 400 people, including women and children, in what is considered one of the largest mass kidnappings carried out by the terrorist group in recent years.

Troops of Operation Hadin Kai (OPHK) on Sunday rescued 360 elderly men, women and young children from the Mandara Mountains, where Boko Haram fighters had been holding captives under harsh and inhumane conditions.

The rescued victims, who were visited on Monday by Borno State Governor, Prof. Babagana Umara Zulum, are currently taking refuge at the Pulka Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) camp, a few kilometres from Ngoshe village.

Recounting her ordeal, a female victim, Aisha Bakar, said she spent three months and two weeks in captivity.

"Throughout our stay, we survived on raw corn soaked in water, which we ate only once a day. That was how we lived for three months," she said.

She added that her body had not adjusted to proper meals since their rescue.

"My stomach is not accepting cooked food now. My children are also having stomach ache after eating some of the food in the camp," she said.

Another victim, Hafsat Musa, narrated how she lost her three children and husband during captivity.

She said she was beaten at the point of abduction in Ngoshe before being taken into the mountains.

Musa said the captives were later moved to a large cave in the Mandara Mountains, where they were forced to sleep on bare ground without food or access to bathing.

"We were kept there without food or bathing. We all suffered hunger and starvation. Sadly, in the three months and two weeks I spent there, I lost my three children and my husband," she said.

She added that she only learned of her husband's death after her release.

"When the Boko Haram leader sent food, his subordinates often diverted it and shared it among themselves, leaving us hungry. Our clothes and hair became very dirty and full of lice," she said.

Musa expressed gratitude to God for her release and thanked



■ Some of the freed Ngoshe abductees at the Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) camp in Pulka

Governor Zulum for facilitating their freedom, while urging others to accept their experiences as fate.

"One of my neighbours also lost four out of her seven children. She only learned about it when we arrived in Pulka," she added.

Zainab Abubakar, a freed mother of two, said they were only fed once a day.

"We thank God for His mercies and pray that the remaining victims will be freed soon," she said.

Most of the victims interviewed said their accounts reflect what those still in captivity are currently enduring in the hands of the terrorists.

One male victim, Idrissa Mustapha, said he was taken from his home in Ngoshe in March while he was breaking his fast. Unlike others, Mustapha said he was treated well by the leader of the insurgents.

"I was taken to the Amir's house, and I used to eat food three times a day. The Amir saw me among several women, so he asked me to follow him to his house.

"We ate together and prayed together. I thank God and our security agencies for securing our lives," he said.

"He treated me with respect, and I was not molested or mistreated throughout my stay, but I chose to leave the camp when I was given the option. Yes, some people stayed back," he added.

Reconstruction ongoing in Ngoshe – Zulum

Meanwhile, addressing the freed hostages in Pulka, Governor Babagana Zulum confirmed the release of 357 persons, noting

that about 82 others had also regained their freedom in smaller batches over the period since their abduction.

The governor said he had released millions of naira for the rehabilitation of Ngoshe community to ensure their safe return.

"So far, the work is nearly complete. We are also interfacing with the community about their return to Ngoshe; those who are willing to return, we are working with the Nigerian military to establish institutional arrangements that will ensure their safe and dignified return," he said.

He explained that the victims were abducted from Ngoshe, a border town in Gwoza Local Government Area of Borno State, following an attack by suspected Boko Haram insurgents earlier this year.

Zulum particularly commended President Bola Ahmed Tinubu for what he described as his personal

intervention and commitment to restoring peace, which he said helped accelerate the negotiation and rescue process.

"I want to express my deepest appreciation, on behalf of the government and people of Borno State and the Gwoza community in particular, to the President and Commander-in-Chief of the Nigerian Armed Forces, Bola Ahmed Tinubu, for all the efforts he has been making in ensuring the return of peace and stability not only to Borno State but to the entire country," Zulum said.

The governor also extended commendations to the Nigerian military, the Department of State Services (DSS), and other security agencies involved in the operation, praising their professionalism and coordination.

"I also want to use this opportunity to commend the Nigerian Armed Forces, the Office of the National Security Adviser, the Department of State Services, and all other security agencies, including our gallant

"We were kept there without food or bathing. We all suffered hunger and starvation. Sadly, in the three months and two weeks I spent there, I lost my three children and my husband".

Civilian JTF, Forest Guards, vigilantes, and hunters, who have participated immensely in ensuring the release of these abducted men, women, and children," Zulum added.

He explained that while 357 captives were freed in the latest coordinated effort, others had been released in phases over preceding months, bringing the total number of freed persons to 434.

"We are here to felicitate with the Ngoshe community following the release of the abducted women and children, numbering about 434. What we saw this morning is about 360, released two days ago. But some two to three weeks ago, we also received other people, totalling about 434," Zulum explained.

Zulum also directed the distribution of relief materials, including food and non-food items, to all the released persons as part of immediate humanitarian support.

The rescued individuals are currently receiving medical and psychological care at a government facility, after which they will be gradually reintegrated into their communities.



■ Community deserted following Boko Haram attack in Pulka, Borno State in March