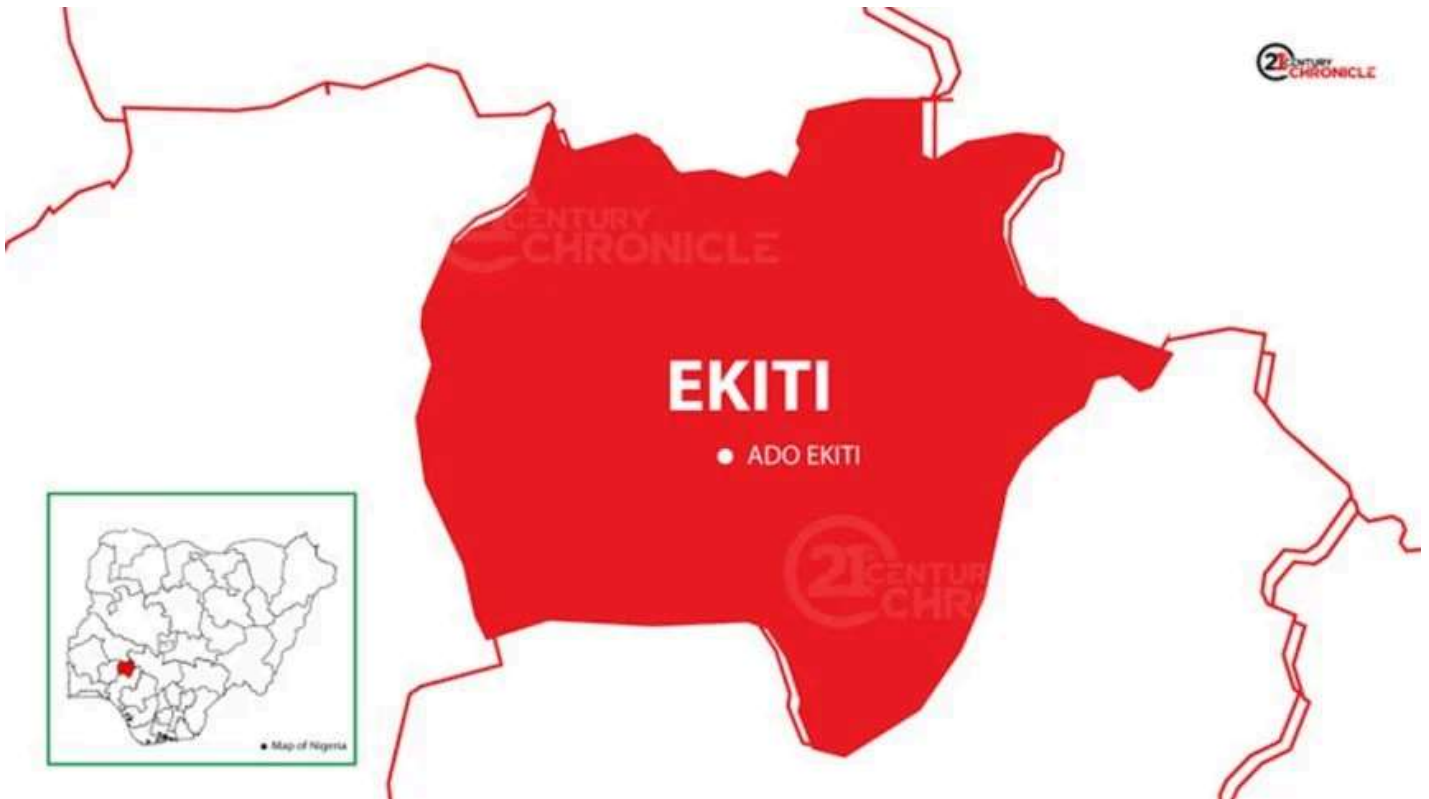


How we paid N25.5m, gave bags of rice, 150 litres of fuel, drinks, others to secure release of our people —Ekiti community leader

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...As gunmen release kidnapped church worshippers after 67 days in Ekiti •84-year-old woman dies in captivity

...We successfully rescued victims —Police

Gunmen, who kidnapped 16 worshippers during a church crusade in Eda Oniyo-Ekiti, Ilejemeje Local Government Area of Ekiti State, have released the victims after 67 days in captivity.

Sunday Tribune had reported that the kidnappers, numbering about 10, stormed a Christ Apostolic Church (CAC) open crusade at about 7 p.m. on April 28, 2026, and opened fire on worshippers.

During the attack in the community bordering Kwara State, a visiting pastor was killed before the bandits whisked away 16 worshippers, including children, women and elderly persons, among them an 84-year-old woman. While 15 of the worshippers were released on Saturday at about 2 a.m., it was learnt that the octogenarian died in captivity due to the stress and harsh conditions she endured.

The state government and security agencies had assured the families and the community of the safe return of the victims, maintaining that efforts were ongoing to track down the gunmen in the forest.

Sunday Tribune gathered that the abductors had earlier received N10.5 million and food items, including bags of rice, from the community in May but failed to release the victims, instead demanding additional money.

The gunmen eventually released the victims at a location beyond the Egbe community in Kogi State after a fresh payment of N15 million, totalling N25.5 million in addition to five bags of rice, 150 litres of fuel and other items.

When **Sunday Tribune** visited the Ekiti State University Teaching Hospital, where the victims were receiving medical attention on Saturday, they appeared visibly exhausted, weak and traumatised.

Speaking shortly after the victims regained their freedom, the National President of the Eda Progressive Union (EPU), Rufus Ajayi, described the development as nothing short of divine intervention, saying the community had endured weeks of agony, prayers, fasting and desperate fundraising efforts to save their loved ones.

Ajayi, who said he was personally involved in the negotiations and rescue efforts, expressed profound gratitude to God for the safe return of the worshippers.

"I am too excited and I give all the glory to God Almighty. We prayed, we fasted and God answered our prayers. God softened the hearts of the kidnappers and made them release our people," he said.



The community leader revealed that the abductors had initially demanded N100 million ransom, an amount he said was impossible for the agrarian community to raise.

According to him, the kidnappers had earlier collected N10.5 million from the community during the first phase of negotiations, but later increased their demand to N100 million before eventually reducing it to N50 million and subsequently N15 million after prolonged pleading.

Ajayi narrated that residents exhausted all available means to raise funds, with contributions coming from natives of the town both at home and in the Diaspora, while lamenting the death of one of the victims in the abductors' camp.

He said, "Many people contributed as low as N1,000 before we could raise the first N10.5 million. For this second effort, we had to contribute again, borrow money and even sell our properties. We told them plainly that our village is not a big town and there was no way we could raise such an amount.

"We begged them continuously. We explained that if we had N30 million or N50 million, we would have paid immediately just to secure the release of our people. Eventually, they realised that the money was coming only from the community and not from government sources."

Ajayi disclosed that after intense negotiations, the kidnappers agreed to accept N15 million alongside food items and other supplies. According to him, the items delivered to the abductors included five bags of rice, five 30-litre kegs of petrol, loaves of bread, cartons of noodles, soft drinks and other foodstuffs demanded by the kidnappers.



"They insisted that apart from the money, we must include five bags of rice, five 30-litre kegs of petrol, bread, Indomie, soft drinks and several other food items. We provided everything they requested because our priority was to bring our people back alive," he explained.

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The EPU president, who is a former commissioner in the state, described the period of captivity as traumatic for both the victims and the community, noting that those involved in the rescue mission endured enormous hardship before finally securing their release.

He disclosed that three members of the negotiation team left the community three days earlier and travelled deep into remote areas to complete the handover process.

According to him, the abductors initially directed the team to proceed towards Eruku in Kwara State before later moving them to another location in Kogi State where the victims were eventually handed over.

Ajayi said the kidnappers had initially demanded that the supplies be transported on motorcycles due to serious logistical difficulties.

"They first asked us to look for motorcycles to convey the items because of the terrain, but our people explained that it was not possible. Eventually, they agreed that vehicles should come as far as possible and then manoeuvre through the bush to the final location," he narrated.

The community leader also spoke on the role of government during the crisis, acknowledging the difficult balance authorities face in responding to kidnapping incidents.

While expressing disappointment over what many residents perceived as inadequate intervention, Ajayi said he understood the government's reluctance to directly negotiate with kidnappers.

"The government was not responding to our calls in the way many expected, but I understand the position of the government. If the government starts paying kidnappers directly, it may encourage more abductions every week.

"In the end, it was what we could contribute and borrow within our own community that saved our people," he said.

Ajayi described the release as a testimony of faith, sacrifice and communal solidarity, saying the entire town remained grateful to God for preserving the lives of the abducted worshippers while mourning the death of the octogenarian.

Return of kidnapped worshippers brings relief, sorrow to Ilejemeje —LGA Chairman

Meanwhile, the chairman of Ilejemeje Local Government Area, Pius Alabi, has expressed mixed emotions, following the release and return of the abducted worshippers, saying the development has brought both joy and sadness to the people of the council area.

Alabi said the entire local government was relieved and grateful to see the victims reunited with their families after more than two months in captivity.

"We are happy today because our people have finally returned home safely. However, our joy is incomplete because we lost one of our own during the painful ordeal, and that loss remains a source of deep sorrow for the community," he said.

The council chairman appreciated the efforts and support of the Ekiti State government in securing the release of the victims, commending the administration for standing with the affected families throughout the difficult period.

He also thanked security agencies, community leaders and all those who played roles in ensuring the safe return of the worshippers while praying for the repose of the soul of the deceased victim and comfort for the bereaved family.

We successfully rescued victims from their abductors —Police

Also reacting to the development, the Ekiti State Police Command explained that security agencies played critical role in securing the release of the victims.

The Police Public Relations Officer (PPRO), SP Sunday Abutu, in a statement on Saturday, explained that the rescue operation was made possible through the combined efforts of the police, the military, Amotekun and other local security outfits.

The statement reads: "The successful rescue followed sustained intelligence-led operations and coordinated efforts by the Nigeria Police Force, the military, other security agencies, the Amotekun Corps, local hunters and the Ekiti State Government.

"The rescued victims have since been taken to the hospital for medical examination and treatment to ascertain their health condition and ensure they receive adequate medical care.

"The Commissioner of Police, CP Michael Falade, commends the dedication, professionalism and synergy exhibited by all security stakeholders whose collective efforts culminated in the successful rescue of the victims.

"He particularly appreciates the Ekiti State Government under the leadership of His Excellency, Governor Biodun Abayomi Oyebanji, for its unwavering support to the security agencies, which greatly contributed to the success of the operation. The Commissioner also thanks the good people of Ekiti State for their continuous cooperation, vigilance and timely provision of credible information.

"While efforts are currently being intensified to arrest the perpetrators, the Commissioner of Police reassures residents of the Command's unwavering commitment to protecting lives and property across the state. He urges members of the public to remain vigilant and continue to support the Police and other security agencies by promptly reporting any suspicious person or activity to the nearest police station."