

Military denies running Kwara camp as Amnesty alleges 150 deaths

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FILE: Director of Defence Media Operations, Major General Michael Onoja.

By Solomon Odeniyi

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The Defence Headquarters has denied any involvement in the management of the camp in Kwara State, where Amnesty International alleged that at least 150 detainees, mostly children, died under inhumane conditions.

The Director, Defence Media Operations, Maj Gen Michael Onoja, said the Nigerian military does not operate or control the facility identified as the National Youth Service Corps Orientation Camp in Yikpata.

“The so-called military detention facility is not under the purview of the military. The military has no business whatsoever with that location.

“You may wish to channel your enquiries to the appropriate government agency for clarification,” Onoja said when contacted.

Amnesty International had, in a report released on Thursday, called on Nigerian authorities to urgently investigate the reported deaths of at least 150 detainees, mostly children, allegedly held at a camp in Kwara State.

In a report released on Thursday, the organisation said the victims were among about 1,500 pastoralists detained for over three months at the National Youth Service Corps orientation camp in Yikpata under what it described as inhumane conditions.

According to Amnesty International, the detainees were displaced from their communities following escalating attacks by armed groups across Asa, Edu, Ifelodun, and Patigi local government areas.

The organisation alleged that the victims were relocated to the camp after being instructed to vacate their villages to allow for security operations.

“The Nigerian authorities must conduct a prompt, thorough, independent, impartial, transparent and effective investigation into the reported deaths of at least 150 members of the Fulani community, most of them children, who have been arbitrarily detained... in Kwara State,” Amnesty International said.

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It added that its investigation found that the victims were among about 1,500 Fulani pastoralists detained at the NYSC orientation camp in Yikpata over the past three months.

“They were transported to the camp after being forced to leave their homes amid escalating attacks by armed groups in Kwara. Instead of finding safety, they face overcrowded and unsanitary conditions, restrictions on their movement, acute malnutrition, and disease.

“At least 100 pregnant women at the camp are at risk of life-threatening complications due to a lack of adequate maternal care,” the report stated.

Amnesty said its findings were based on a field investigation conducted between April 5 and 11, during which its researchers visited the camp and interviewed dozens of detainees, survivors, and family members.

The report noted that testimonies from detainees described worsening conditions, including inadequate food supply and rising deaths linked to hunger and illness.

“A 43-year-old man who escaped the camp told Amnesty International: ‘I escaped from the camp because of the difficult living conditions. A total of 154 people have died from hunger and disease since we were brought and detained there. On the day I escaped, six children died,’ the report said.

The organisation also alleged cases of discriminatory profiling, claiming that some Fulani individuals were singled out, unlawfully detained, and in some cases forced to pay bribes to secure their release.

Amnesty International urged the Federal Government to conduct a transparent investigation, ensure accountability for any violations, and provide justice and remedies for victims and their families.

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