

One dies as kidnapped Ekiti worshippers regain freedom

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One of the 16 worshippers abducted during an attack on a Christ Apostolic Church in Eda Oniyo, Ilejemeje Local Government Area of Ekiti State, has died in captivity as the remaining victims finally regained their freedom after more than two months.

The freed worshippers are currently receiving treatment at the Ekiti State University Teaching Hospital, Ado-Ekiti, at the expense of the Ekiti State Government after suffering injuries and severe deprivation while in captivity.

Sunday PUNCH gathered that the victims were kidnapped on April 28, 2026, when gunmen invaded the church in Eda Oniyo, a border community between Ekiti and Kwara states, during an evening service.

The attackers shot the pastor before abducting 16 worshippers, including women and children, and marched them into the forest.

Sources in the community said the abductors initially moved the victims through forests into neighbouring Kwara State.

Sunday PUNCH gathered that the kidnappers had initially demanded a ₦1bn ransom, which was later reduced to ₦50m.

Although the community reportedly raised and paid ₦10.5m alongside other items demanded by the abductors, the victims remained in captivity, prompting protests by residents and a resolution by the House of Representatives calling for their immediate rescue.

Chairman of Ilejemeje Local Government Area, Alaba Dada, confirmed the victims' release to our correspondent on Saturday but lamented the death of one of the captives.

"I am so happy, and I am sad also. I am happy in the sense that they released the kidnapped persons. We lost one woman among them; that is what makes me sad. But we appreciate God for the people that came back home," he said.

Dada said the victims were initially taken to the General Hospital in Iye Ekiti before being transferred to EKSUTH for comprehensive medical care.

"Their condition is bad, they cannot walk, they are injured, the kidnappers beat them. They said they had not eaten for over a week. But we thank God for their release," he said.

A community leader, Ayodele Oni, described the victims' release as a huge relief after weeks of anxiety.

He said their freedom brought an end to about 65 days of mental and psychological torture for the community and the victims' families.

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Confirming the development in a statement on Saturday, the Ekiti State Police Command said the victims were rescued through coordinated security operations.

The Police Public Relations Officer, Sunday Abutu, said the rescue followed sustained intelligence-led operations involving the police, 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 PPRO stated.

He added that efforts had been intensified to apprehend the abductors.

The police spokesperson said the Commissioner of Police, Michael Falade, commended all security agencies for their collaboration and appreciated the support of the state government and residents in the operation.

Meanwhile, the Ekiti State Governor, Biodun Oyebanji, has directed the management of the Ekiti State University Teaching Hospital to provide comprehensive medical screening and treatment for the rescued victims.

The directive was disclosed in a statement issued on Saturday by the governor's Special Adviser on Media, Olayinka Oyebo.

According to the statement, the governor also instructed the state Ministry of Health and Human Services to take full responsibility for the victims' welfare and wellbeing, with the state government footing all medical bills incurred during their treatment.

Oyebo said the rescued victims are currently receiving care at the teaching hospital and will remain under medical supervision until they are certified fit to reunite with their families.

"Governor Oyebanji expressed his appreciation to President Bola Tinubu for his support in ensuring the safe return of the victims. He also commended the heads of all security agencies in the state, the Ekiti State Council of Traditional Rulers, leaders of the Eda Oniyo community, the Ekiti State chapter of the Christian Association of Nigeria and other stakeholders for their roles in securing the victims' release," the statement read.

The governor urged individuals politicising the incident on social media to desist and instead collaborate with the government in building a safer and more prosperous state.

He also extended his heartfelt condolences to the family of the victim who died while in captivity.