

2 killed as vigilante foils bandits' attack on Kogi school



File image of bandits

By Henry Umoru, Omeiza Ajayi, Boluwaji Obahopo & Luminous Jannamike

A vigilante group at Aiyetoro Kiri in Kabba Bunu Local Government Area of Kogi State yesterday foiled bandits' invasion of Kiri High School and prevented the students from being abducted.

The attack came days after bandits abducted 25 schoolgirls of Government Comprehensive Secondary School, Maga, Kebbi State, who have since been released and over 300 students/pupils of St Mary's Catholic School in Niger State.

This is even as the chairman of Christian Association of Nigeria, CAN, in the 19 Northern states and FCT, Rev John Hayab, disclosed that the father of three of the children abducted in the Catholic school had died of heart attack, following the kidnap incident.

Consequently, the national body of CAN yesterday asked the federal government to take urgent decisive action to protect citizens across the country, insisting that the rising wave of attacks demanded an immediate and excuse-free response from the nation's leadership.

Also, the Minister of Federal capital Territory, FCT, Mr. Nyesom Wike, yesterday vowed not to spare officials responsible for issuing an unauthorised circular ordering the closure of schools in Abuja, in view of heightened school attacks in the country.

Meanwhile, there was a rowdy session in the Senate yesterday as lawmakers engaged in heated exchanges over the worsening security situation in the country, with some senators warning that the nation was "under attack" and on the brink of losing public confidence.

Members in the House of Representatives also condemned the federal government for negotiating with bandits to secure the release of 24 students abducted from Government Girls Comprehensive Secondary School, Maga, in Kebbi State.

How vigilantes foiled attack

On the attack on the community school in Kogi State, members of the Kiri Vigilante Group were said to have swiftly mobilised and confronted the attackers.

The vigilante, it was learned, successfully rescued all students who were kidnapped during the assault.

Community sources told Vanguard that no student remained in captivity, following the prompt and coordinated response by the local security team.

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However, the operation was said to have cost the lives of one of the vigilante member who was killed while defending the community, and one Hausa resident who died in the rescue process.

No school children kidnapped at Kiri axis — LGA chairman

Although efforts to reach the state police command for confirmation proved abortive, Chairman of the LGA, Zaccheus Dare Michael, however, confirmed the attack, saying the bandits' attempt on the school was foiled.

In a statement by his Chief Press Secretary, Omofa John, the chairman stated: "The attention of the Kabba/Bunu Local Government Area authority has been drawn to reports circulating around social media platforms regarding the attack at Kiri Axis of Bunu District. In the interest of clarity and public understanding, we wish to formally state some facts.

"The bandits attacked, and they were resisted and repel by our team of security men. Though, there are casualties, including one hunter and one Hausa, killed by stray bullets.

"As we speak, the Joint Task Force had intensified operations with the aim to restore confidence in the area.

"However, the government warned the members of the public and those on social media to stop sending unverified news to the social media, otherwise, they will be made to face the full wrath of the law.

"The joint teams of security tactical units and local vigilantes are currently combing the surrounding bushes for the bandits.

"A thorough operation is ongoing, and normalcy has been restored to the axis. The situation is under strict monitoring."

Father of three abducted Niger schoolchildren dies of heart attack — Northern CAN

In a similar development, the chairman of Northern CAN, Rev. John Hayab, has revealed that a parent died of heart attack, following the abduction of his three children at St Mary's Catholic School in Niger State.

Hayab, who gave the revelation in an interview on Arise News, described the trauma faced by families whose children were kidnapped in Kebbi, Kwara, and Niger states over the past week.

He said the man, simply identified as Mr Anthony, was overwhelmed by the shock of losing his children.

“People want to see concrete action. One of the parents (Mr Anthony) of these girls picked in the school, died yesterday of a heart attack because three of his children are victims.

.”People don’t understand that when you tell it as it is, you’re not speaking against anybody; you are only trying to state the problem.

“The pains and the trauma are still very fresh. We tried speaking to the parents today (yesterday), and they were scared of speaking to us,” the cleric said.

Speaking to the leadership of the church in Kontagora, Hayab said: “It was a very sad thing. You can imagine a man in shock because three children... he would not know what to explain, what is happening to them.

“People don’t understand this. These children have not slept, they have not bathed, and their parents cannot even explain where they are.”

“The onus is now on the Nigerian security agencies to ensure that we don’t speak about this on television. People want to see concrete action,” he said.

Protect Nigerians without excuses, CAN tells FG

On its part, the national body of CAN yesterday asked the federal government to take urgent, decisive action to protect citizens across the country from bandits.

It noted that the rising wave of attacks demanded an immediate and excuse-free response from the nation’s leadership.

CAN President, Archbishop Daniel Okoh, made the call at the opening ceremony of the 32nd Triennial General Assembly of the Christian Council of Nigeria, CCN, in Abuja.

Speaking on the Assembly’s theme, “Demand for Justice and Righteousness,” drawn from Amos 5:24, Okoh said the current security situation was a threat to the nation’s soul and placed fresh moral demands on government.

“The government has a constitutional, moral, and sacred responsibility to protect the lives and property of all Nigerians without discrimination, without delay, and without excuses,” he said.

Archbishop Okoh urged the CCN to continue standing with CAN in pushing for stronger national action, adding that the Church must remain firm and consistent in demanding justice for affected communities.

“Our voices must not waver. Our message must remain consistent and sincere,” he added, encouraging churches to defend the vulnerable and reflect Christ’s values through their actions.

Wike vows sanctions over unauthorised school closure circular in FCT

Also yesterday, Federal Capital Territory, FCT, Minister, Nyesom Wike, said he would not spare officials responsible for issuing an unauthorised circular ordering the closure of schools in Abuja.

Wike, who spoke during a question-and-answer session with journalists shortly after assessing the project at Guzape¹¹, described the unauthorised circular as shocking, irresponsible and capable of causing nationwide panic.

The circular had directed all schools in the FCT shut as a result of attacks on schools by bandits in different parts of the country.

“I was watching television last night (Tuesday) and I saw that FCT had directed that schools should be shut down. I couldn’t believe it,” he said.

The minister said he immediately contacted the Mandate Secretary for Education and security heads, only to discover that no such directive was issued or approved.

“There is no threat that will make us shut down schools,” Wike stressed, adding that the FCT Security Council meeting, which held yesterday, confirmed that the circular had no basis.

Consequently, he reaffirmed the indefinite suspension of the Mandate Secretary for Education, Dr Danlami Hayyo, and promised strict sanctions for directors involved in preparing or circulating the notice.

“It is unimaginable how people could take such a decision without the head of affairs knowing. It is very unfortunate,” he said.

Asked whether the officials might have acted out of caution due to perceived threats, the minister said: “How could you take such an action in anticipation? Even I cannot do that without letting the President know. This is the FCT. Do you know what that tells? That there is insecurity in FCT.”

Wike noted that contiguous states grappling with higher security threats, including Kaduna, Nasarawa and Kogi, did not shut down schools, insisting that Abuja must not be turned into a centre of fear through wrongful administrative decisions. He reiterated that security agencies were fully deployed to protect schools and maintain order, warning that the administration “will not forgive anybody who is involved in this.”

Rowdy session in Senate over rising insecurity

However, a rowdy session broke out in the Senate yesterday as senators engaged in heated exchanges over the worsening security situation in the country.

Some senators warned that the nation was “under attack” and on the brink of losing public confidence.

The debate in the chamber came just hours after the Senate adopted a separate motion commending President Bola Tinubu and security agencies for the swift rescue of dozens of abducted victims in Kwara and Niger states.

The motion, sponsored by Senator Asiru Yisa (Kwara South), also demanded the immediate creation of a Joint Task Force for the Kwara–Kogi corridor, an area security agencies describe as a major escape route for bandits.

The confrontation erupted during debates on the spate of kidnappings across states, including the recent abduction of schoolgirls in Kebbi and mass attacks in Niger and Kwara states.

Yisa told the chamber he was “deeply disturbed” by the attack on Christ Apostolic Church, Eruku, where gunmen killed two worshippers and kidnapped 38 others before their eventual rescue. Lawmakers, in their reaction, said the situation had reached a point that required an immediate and comprehensive federal response.

Deputy Senate President, Barau Jibrin, who noted that the escalating violence had made it clear that Nigeria sought broader support, said: “We should seek assistance from overseas, urging collaboration with global partners to stem the crisis.”

On his part, Senate Leader, Opeyemi Bamidele, described the current wave of attacks as a defining moment for the nation, warning that “business as usual” could lead to catastrophe.

While welcoming the rescue of abducted victims, he expressed concern that security agencies offered no information on terrorists neutralised during the operations.

He also cautioned colleagues against attention-seeking, referencing earlier calls in the House of Representatives for a shutdown of the National Assembly.

In his contribution, Senator Enyinnaya Abaribe pushed back against attempts to blame previous

administrations, insisting that the current government must accept responsibility for recent failings.

Abaribe, who cited reports that troops were withdrawn hours before the Kebbi school attack, said further: “Who asked them? Nobody knows. If I were the Commander-in-Chief, I would demand answers.”

The Senate President, Godswill Akpabio, also expressed concern that intelligence failures and internal sabotage were undermining security agencies, noting reports that the location of a brigadier general killed in Borno had been compromised. He said it was troubling that despite security advisories issued to schools in Kebbi, bandits still struck unhindered.

Tempers flared when Senator Seriake Dickson warned that Nigeria was “losing prestige and integrity” due to constant attacks, accusing the majority caucus of massaging the issues, rather than addressing them head-on.

Uproar

His remarks triggered uproar from All Progressives Congress, APC, senators, forcing the presiding officer to cut off his microphone. As some lawmakers

reiterated claims that security agencies were aware of the locations and motives of terrorists, Akpabio cautioned against turning the crisis into a sectarian narrative.

“This is orchestrated to damage the image of democracy. There is nothing like targeting Muslims or Christians. It is an attack on all. This country is under attack,” he said.

Senator Adams Oshiomhole, in his contribution, rose in defence of President Bola Tinubu, arguing that the administration was doing its best under severe pressure.

While demanding an investigation into the troop withdrawal in Kebbi, Oshiomhole said: “Who ordered the military to withdraw? That person should be tried for terrorism.”

He also queried alleged inconsistencies in the justice system, noting that a convicted terrorist was sentenced to 20 years, while those who killed a bandit in self-defence were condemned to death.

Some lawmakers, however, renewed calls for the death penalty for kidnappers. The Senate subsequently adopted this demand among its resolutions.

Negotiating with bandits will fuel more violence, Reps warn Tinubu

Also, some lawmakers in the House of Representatives condemned and warned the federal government against negotiating with bandits, saying it would fuel more violence.

The lawmakers, including Muhammed Soba (North West); Zakari Mohammed (North Central); Olasupo Abiodun (South West); Sadiq Ibrahim (North East); Uko Nkole (South East); and Bassey Ewa (South South), in a statement, said the government’s engagement with kidnappers, disclosed by President Bola Tinubu’s aide, Mr Bayo Onanuga, amounted to a betrayal of Nigerians and undermined national security.

The condemnation followed a special plenary yesterday, during which members decried rising insecurity and the daily fear faced by citizens as kidnappers and bandits operate with impunity.

In a statement by representatives from all six geopolitical zones, the lawmakers, operating under the aegis of the House to the Rescue, said: “The House to the Rescue unequivocally condemns the federal government’s ongoing negotiations with bandits and criminal networks responsible for the wave of kidnappings tearing through Nigeria.

“At a time citizens are crying out for protection, the government has chosen to sit at the same table with those who abduct children, violate women, terrorise communities and undermine the authority of the Nigerian state.”

The lawmakers, who criticised Tinubu’s approach to security, said: “This is not leadership, this is an abdication of responsibility.

“In recent weeks, Nigerians had endured fresh kidnappings in Kano, Kwara, Kebbi

In recent weeks, Nigerians had endured fresh kidnappings in Kano, Kwara, Kebbi and other states, while communities remained vulnerable and traumatised.

"Instead of decisive action, the Federal Government had offered silence, excuses and back-door concessions to violent groups.

"No functioning nation rewards criminality with dialogue. Negotiation with bandits has never worked anywhere." Citing international examples, the lawmakers warned that negotiations with violent non-state actors had failed elsewhere.

Citing examples from around the world, the lawmakers noted that in Colombia, "Talks with the Revolutionary Armed Forces emboldened kidnappers, increased ransom operations, and strengthened the group militarily."

They added that in Mexico, "back-channel contacts with cartels worsened kidnapping rates, empowered gangs, and created a security collapse from which Mexico still suffers."

They argued that in Afghanistan, concessions to the Taliban, including prisoner swaps, allowed the group to regroup and eventually overthrow the entire government.

They further warned that in Somalia, "engagement with warlords only deepened the conflict and gave militias space to expand," while in Mali, "deals with jihadist/bandit groups allowed them to spread violence into neighbouring countries."

The lawmakers cautioned the Federal Government that "negotiating with violent non-state actors leads to more violence, not peace Nigeria is not an exception."

Schoolgirls release not victory, terrorists running alternative govt – Atiku

Reflecting on the situation, former vice-president, Atiku Abubakar, said terrorists and bandits now run an alternate government under President Bola Tinubu.

In a statement by his media office, Atiku criticised comments from Bayo Onanuga, Tinubu's special adviser on information and strategy, that the federal government opted for a non-kinetic approach to safeguard the lives of abductees.

He described Onanuga's remarks as "a shameful attempt to whitewash a national tragedy and dress up government's incompetence as heroism".

He said: "Truth be told, the release of abducted Nigerians is not a trophy moment; it is a damning reminder that terrorists now operate freely, negotiate openly, and dictate terms, while this administration issues press statements to save face".

"If the DSS and the military could 'track' the kidnappers in real time and 'made contact' with them, then the question is simple: Why were these criminals not arrested, neutralised, or dismantled on the spot?"

He said the government's narrative suggested that kidnapping had now been reduced to "a routine phone call between criminals and state officials", which, he said, emboldened violent groups and undermined public trust.

While warning that the implications of the administration's strategy were dangerous for national security, Atiku said: "Under Tinubu, terrorists and bandits have become an alternative government — negotiating, collecting ransom, and walking away untouched — while the presidency celebrates their 'compliance.'"

He accused the presidency of either misleading Nigerians about its capabilities or revealing a disturbing level of incompetence.

"If the security agencies truly had eyes on the kidnappers, then letting them escape is a national disgrace that smacks of complicity.

"If they did not have such capacity, then Onanuga is simply manufacturing lies to cover up a monumental failure of leadership," Atiku said. He also submitted that Nigerians deserved real protection, not "propaganda" and "fairy tales by moonlight".