

Oyo school abduction: We could only watch as gunmen carted away our children — Parents



FILE IMAGE

By Adeola Badru

Fear and grief enveloped residents of Oriire Local Government Area of Oyo State on Friday after suspected terrorists abducted no fewer than 45 pupils and a teacher during coordinated attacks on three schools in the area.

The affected schools are Baptist Nursery and Primary School, Yawota; Community Grammar School, Esiele; and L.A. Primary School.

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The attackers, said to be heavily armed and dressed in military camouflage, reportedly stormed the communities around 8am, firing gunshots indiscriminately and causing panic among residents, teachers and pupils.



A teacher at Baptist Nursery and Primary School, Elizabeth Olagoke, who narrowly escaped being abducted, recounted the terrifying incident.

According to her, the gunmen arrived on six motorcycles, with two men on each bike, before launching the attack.

“The terrorists came around 8am when school activities had already started. They began shooting immediately, and everybody started running for safety,” she said.

Olagoke explained that the attackers communicated in Yoruba, Hausa and Pidgin English throughout the operation.

“They were all young men, masked and dressed in camouflage. They first entered my classroom and held me together with a two-year-old child I was carrying. I pleaded with them, and one of them ordered that I should be released,” she said.

She added that the attackers attempted to pursue her as she fled from the classroom.

“I had about 20 children in my class. Many of the abducted children came from Yawota, Esiele and Alausa communities. They also kidnapped one teacher. Altogether, about 48 persons were taken away,” she added.

The teacher further disclosed that the assailants stole motorcycles belonging to residents during the invasion.

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“They took my husband’s motorcycle from the school premises. They also killed a commercial motorcyclist and seized his bike. In Yawota alone, they stole three motorcycles,” she stated.

In separate exclusive telephone interviews with Vanguard, parents of the abducted pupils narrated how they helplessly watched the attackers flee with their children after overpowering security guards stationed at the schools.

One of the distraught mothers, Serah Oguntunde, said she sighted the kidnappers escaping with several pupils, including her 13-year-old daughter, Hanah Ojo, a JSS1 student of Community Grammar School, Esiele.

According to her, the attackers moved through Alausa with schoolchildren inside a vehicle before abandoning and setting the car ablaze.

“There were many children inside the vehicle alongside the gunmen. We later heard that the vehicle was burnt after they left the area,” she said.

Oguntunde said she rushed to the school after hearing gunshots, only to discover that her daughter was nowhere to be found.

“The entire place was deserted and tense. Since then, we have not heard anything about my daughter. I just pray she returns safely,” she lamented.

Another parent, Ajarah Ayanwale, told Vanguard that residents initially mistook the kidnappers for soldiers because they wore military uniforms and arrived in a manner suggesting they were security operatives.

“We thought security personnel had come to protect our communities from attacks. Some residents were even happy when they saw them entering the area,” she said.

She explained that confusion erupted moments later when the gunmen suddenly opened fire.

“Immediately the shooting started, everybody began running in different directions. We became worried about our children who were already in school,” she added.

Ayanwale disclosed that while her seven-year-old son in Primary 1 was abducted, her four-year-old child managed to escape.

“When the children did not return home, we started searching everywhere and later realised they had been kidnapped. We heard they were taken away on motorcycles and inside a vehicle,” she said tearfully.

Similarly, Selimat Abadi, whose two children were abducted during the attack, said parents and farmers in the community were thrown into confusion after hearing gunshots from the direction of the schools.

OF THE SCHOOLS.

She said residents later saw armed men transporting pupils through Alausa community.

“We were going to the farm when we suddenly heard gunshots. As we returned, we saw the gunmen driving with some of the children,” she recounted.

Abadi disclosed that the vehicle conveying the pupils was reportedly driven by the abducted school principal.

“My children, Tosin and his younger sibling, left home around 7am for school like every other day. They are passionate about their education,” she said.

She added that several parents gathered at the schools after the attack searching desperately for their missing children.