

Police connivance in robberies, how true?

MORE often these days, we read reports of policemen who connive with armed robbers, to carry out their nefarious activities. Some times, they on their own engage in these evil acts; aid, abet them. This brings us to the question of what role should the police play in safeguarding lives and properties. All over the world, the primary responsibility of the police is to protect lives and properties of citizens, and to enforce law and order.

In Nigeria, the opposite is the case, as the police are the ones who actually, in some instances perpetrate these acts of robberies on the citizens they are paid to protect. What an irony!

Last week, Lagos State police command paraded three policemen, for various robberies, including the robbery at Access bank Plc. Among the officers paraded is an assistant superintendent of police. This is highly disappointing and unfortunate, in that the citizens themselves are now vulnerable to police criminals, apart from the regular criminals that terrorize us.

On our highways, cases of robbery attacks on both luxury and private vehicles leading to several deaths and loss of valuable properties have become a regular feature,

that one begins to wonder if there can be any solution to this problem. In making reference to highway robberies, the most notorious zones for robbers' unchallenged and unperturbed operations are Owo road in Ondo, Okene in Kogi State, Okpella - Auchi Road, Okada-Benin Road - Edo State, Asaba-Iselle Ukwu-Ogwashe Ukwu Road in Delta State.

Studies show that robbers usually operate in these areas for hours on end, both during the day and night. Recently, at Okene - Okpella Road, a Reverend Father returning from Nnewi to his base in Minna was shot dead in broad daylight. Last week Saturday (early dark hours of the night) armed robbers killed two persons in a luxury bus at Owo, Ondo State. The victims were a male passenger and the bus driver who they used bullets to disembowel him.

Sometime in June last year, at a meeting Mr. President held with stakeholders in the transport sector on ways to stem frequent robbery attacks on luxury buses, he lamented over the issue, but before the meeting could finish, armed robbers unleashed the worst mayhem on another Abuja bound luxury bus killing many passengers. They appeared to be sending a signal to Mr. President and the stakeholders

chief executive had cause to reveal how he was a victim of robbers' attack near a police check point. All these go to show the level of insecurity on our highways.

There have been calls on government to put a stop to night travels in the country, but the point remains that these robberies take place in both day and night. Besides, it amounts to an infringement on the fundamental right of free movement as enshrined in the constitution to restrict or determine when, and where a person should go or not. To do that would amount to government admitting failure for a job some people are paid to do. In this case, government should look inwards and find ways to make the police force and other security agencies perform optimally.

A situation where police supply arms to armed robbers to carry out their devilish acts should also be scrutinized. This is another method of connivance.

Government can also tinker with different ideas on how to check this menace. For example, there could be helicopter surveillance on major highways of the country. Secondly, if the police can no longer meet up with their assigned duty, government may consider drafting soldiers on the highways to check the activities of these hoodlums, especially along notorious black spots. Let's face it, the situation we find ourselves today where robbers kill and maim road users everyday and night requires a drastic measure, and indeed an urgent security meeting to be convened by Mr. President.

This cannot be allowed to continue, especially if we consider that it is the first duty of any responsible and responsive government to

protect lives and properties. Where government fails to do this, then life becomes uninteresting, short and brutish. We cannot in all honesty promote democracy with the level of insecurity pervading our highways and cities. The mere fact that some people have been entrusted with the responsibility is enough for us to go to sleep with our eyes closed, but if the reverse is the case, then government should review the performance of the Nigerian police.

The President in council can also constitute a high powered Presidential Security Committee, comprising of stakeholders in the transport sector, such as the Police, Luxury Bus Operators, FRSC and the press. The essence is to enable Mr. President have first hand knowledge of what happens on the highways regularly and from undiluted sources of information.

Again, it would help the authorities to hold someone accountable for any armed robbery attack and where it took place. Another advantage is that it would make for checks and balances on the part of assigned officers, beginning from the Inspector General, down to the divisional Police Officers.

It has also being observed that the robbery attacks on vehicles last several hours, and most times close to Police check points, without any form of police intervention, only for them to reappear immediately after such operations.

Some school of thought believe that Police Commissioners and Area Commanders are mere businessmen who utilize the opportunity of such postings to seek greener pastures. They

explore avenues through which they can make it before their posting period elapses.

Therefore, to protect citizens' lives and properties, government should embark on far reaching measures rather than the periodic cosmetic measures of scratching the surface. Truth must be told, unless we take these matter serious, we all are vulnerable.

Another worrying dimension to all these is the sophistication of weapons used in these robberies. They are obviously not dane guns or ordinary weapons you can get in the open market. It is obvious that some of these weapons sound like weapons used by the security outfits like police and army. The fact that some soldiers and policemen have been arrested in the recent past for their involvement in robberies lend credence to this observation.

Pathetic stories of bus passengers who have been stripped naked by robbers in the course of carrying out their operations is also a cause for concern. This, no doubt debases our collective humanity. Women and daughters have been raped in the open, and in the presence of their hapless husbands, sons, brothers, and members of the public. One begins to wonder what kind of society we are living in, where human beings are debased to the point of beasts.

The point must be made that they debase the humanity of all of us, for if this trend continues, who knows whose turn it will be next, and what dimension the trend would take. A stitch in time they say saves nine.

By Chukwudi Enekwechi
Abuja

Re: Oro-Ago-Omu-Aran road (Oko, Orisa, Roro bridges)

thankful for you and your administration as we hope for more good things to come our way. Again, I am very grateful

John O. Abolaji, Ph.D.
40450 E. Colorado Ave
Bennett, Colorado 80102
U.S.A

IN July 2004, following the death of my father and the inability to bury him promptly due to the impassability of Oko bridge,