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'Kidnappers still terrorizing us on Abuja-Kaduna road'

By Andrew Agbese, Christiana T. Alabi, Kaduna & Nathaniel Bivan, Abuja | Publish Date: Jul 29 2017 2:00AM

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Suspected kidnappers paraded at Kaduna Police Command HQ

Kidnap cases have risen in Nigeria, and are currently witnessing a spike in the north, including the Kaduna-Abuja road, where vehicles are intercepted on the highway, and travelers are abducted until ransom is paid. Despite police and some military presence, motorists are still crying out that the

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crime continues to rage on, in some cases turning deadly. Daily Trust takes a look.

The Nnamdi Azikiwe International Airport Abuja reopened on April 18, after a six-week closure to allow for repairs on its runway, and during the six weeks when the Kaduna International Airport served as an alternative, motorists, passengers and other road-users confirmed that kidnapping - which had then become rife - had reduced sharply, as did armed robberies, car-jacking, and even cattle-rustling. But between April and now, there have been more than a dozen known kidnap cases along on the route, even as many of the communities along the route have also experienced a resurgence of violent crimes by criminal gangs.

In the last three months, a House of Reps member, and external auditor to NHIS, four family members, and many others, have all been kidnapped on the Abuja-Kaduna road, leaving families to pay huge ransoms. When Daily Trust visited Kakau, it was gathered that in less than a month, six people were kidnapped in that area alone. The abductees include the wife of a village head and two children who were later released after ransom was paid. A pastor's wife was also kidnapped and was not released until ransom was paid. Last week's Thursday, a widow and her little son were also abducted from her home in Kakau, released on Wednesday night, after payment of ransom.

Last Thursday one Mrs. Yusuf, a widow was kidnapped alongside her young child at Kakau, in Chikun Local Government Area, from home. A source told Daily Trust that the mother-of-three's late husband was killed by hired assassins two years ago. Mother and son were released Wednesday night after ransom was paid.

Motorcyclists operating in the area dread the kidnapers, too. "There are some areas we daren't ply. Like when passengers want to go to the new railway station, which is far inside the community, we usually decline, as that's a kidnapping dark spot, as some have been robbed of their motorcycles," Ibrahim, a motorcyclist, said. "So whenever I hear anyone wants to travel by rail, I advise them to go to Rigasa Rail Station. In fact, just last week, a man was killed by unidentified persons and his corpse dumped by the road."

Ibrahim stressed that government needs to ensure security.

A resident close to a female kidnap victim who has been released, said the kidnapers are "frighteningly well-organised", making apprehension difficult "They're still terrorising us," said the source.

Then in nearby Kakruna, also in Chikun LGA, unidentified gunmen killed a vigilante while kidnapping the wife of the Sarki of the community, Mrs Amos



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and her two children. Witnesses said the Sarki and his son were the initial targets, but they escaped.

The woman and her children, Daily Trust learnt, were released after ransom was paid.

Due to the heightening of cases of kidnapping, many travelers now avoid the expressway while travelling to Abuja even though the route is shorter, while others travel in modest vehicles and during the day, as the kidnappers mostly operate early in the morning or at late evenings.

Kaduna State spokesperson of Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC), ASC Orndiir Terzungwe said for now, the state command has not done a significant deployment along Kaduna-Abuja expressway, “though we have embarked on covert operations and some of the challenges is that people hardly report cases to the NSCDC, leaving us without information about the kidnappers or their hide-outs”.

“We’re looking at possible reinforcement from Abuja to cover from Kaduna to Niger, and Abuja. We’re also intensifying surveillance,” Terzungwe said.

The Inspector-General of Police, Ibrahim Kpotun Idris, this week directed the immediate redeployment of all police officers currently serving in different formations along the Abuja-Kaduna road. The affected officials include “Area Commanders, Divisional Police Officers, all other officers, Inspectors and rank and file serving in the police divisions, police stations and outposts situated on Abuja-Kaduna-Zaria highway”.

A statement from the Force Headquarters said “New Area Commanders, Divisional Police Officers, other senior officers, Inspectors and rank and file have been posted to take over from the outgoing ones, to ensure total success of Operations Absolute Sanity currently ongoing on Abuja-Kaduna Highway aimed at routing out gangs of kidnappers and armed robbers terrorising Abuja-Kaduna Highway.”

Before that, the police had also reportedly deployed over 600 men on the highway.

The Minister of Interior, retired Lt.-Gen. Abdulrahman Dambazzau also visited Rijana, a small community along Abuja-Kaduna highway, which has been a hotbed of kidnapping, and a host of other crimes, often violent. Members of the community, through their spokesman, Abdulsalam Abubakar, told the minister point-blank that the rise in kidnapping is because the gangs have collaborators and informants within security agencies.

Abubakar said: “We’re scared to give information, as we can’t understand how 600 security personnel will be around here, but are unable to enter the forests and bushes to flush out the kidnappers. Our youths have been



corrupted by the criminals. We have hitherto been giving information to the police, but instead of improvement, it's the other way round. That's how in the process of giving out information, we lost 18 people. There was one of us who was seen as a very brave man, and he gave list of suspects to the police, and three days later he was brutally murdered, hacked to pieces in his wife's presence. Same happened to Malam Abdulrahman, Yakubu, Sani and Solomon, the son of a chief."

Other efforts by security agencies yielded six notorious kidnappers terrorizing the Kaduna-Abuja highway, courtesy of joint security outfit Operation Yaki. The suspects were picked up by Surveillance Patrol Teams in a joint operation with the Inspector-General of Police Intelligence Response Teams (IRT) and with the support from the Technical Intelligence Unit (TIU). Those arrested included the leader of the gang, Adamu Mamman, a 35-year-old of Amana village in Igabi LGA. Also, Ali Rabo aka Blakky of Liman Ibada village in Chikun LGA, and Awwalu Ahmad aka Mota, of Rijana village, who is the main informant of the gang. Others arrested are Shehu Idris Shagari, 27, of Gadan Gayan village in Igabi LGA; Umar Antijo, 27, of Rijana, and Babangida Abdullahi, also of Rijana, a receiver of stolen cattle, phones and laptops. They were arrested at various locations, all in Kaduna, and they confessed to several kidnappings of motorists along the Abuja-Kaduna highway.

But even with the aforementioned, motorists on the road are still disturbed, complaining that kidnappings are still ongoing. Usaini Danfulani, a driver who operates at the Abuja Junction Motor Park in Kaduna, confirmed that the rate of kidnapping on the route is still on the high side. He said commercial drivers are facing many challenges, as the kidnappings are causing a drop in business. "Last week I was lucky to escape when the kidnappers blocked the road. The cars ahead of me were stopped by gunshots from the kidnappers. They simply drag people from their cars and go," he said.

Danfulani said what the government needs to do to stop the kidnappers is to ensure the security men go into the bush to hunt them down, because immediately the police withdraw from their stop-and-search operations on the highways and go, the kidnappers will simply emerge. "Then after they're done, the police would come from nowhere," he said, adding: "The kidnappers are not that many. The villagers know them very well, so with proper cooperation, the hideout of the kidnappers could be located."

Agada, another driver at the Abuja Junction Motor Park, said the security men need to go into villages like Rijana and Sabon Maro. "One day while coming from Abuja, I saw at Sabon Maro some questionable-looking people with knives, machetes and sticks crossing into a nearby bush. Of course, I sped off with my passengers," he told Daily Trust, adding that more security is needed along the route. .



Another driver, Malam Ya'u Zaria, said the kidnappings mostly happen around Alheri Camp, Digan Jigi and Gida Musa. He also lamented at what he called "selective concern" at incidents. "You'll not hear anything on the issue until a prominent person is kidnapped." His statement underscores the other problem, when rural-dwellers are also kidnapped, forced to part with cattle, produce or even petty cash as ransom for the freedom - and safety - of their loved ones.

One of the vigilantes (name withheld) told Daily Trust that there is need to investigate the security operatives. "Majority of the kidnappings along Abuja-Kaduna expressway occur when the security agents are not there or some few kilometers away from checkpoints. And even when policemen are called, they sound sirens to the scene. How do they expect the evil-doers to wait having heard their arrival?" he queried.

But kidnapping should not have been handled as ordinary crime, but treated specially from the beginning it began to pose problems, according to former Inspector-General of Police, Mike Okiro, who is currently the Chairman of the Police Service Commission. He told Daily Trust that he had earlier advised that a committee be set up to look into the issue.

"The police can create a particular section or department to handle kidnapping, with special training and equipment," Okiro said.

Okiro said when he was proposed as chair of the committee, he gave a list of retired police and DSS officers, and even civilians he knew would be devoted. "But unfortunately, it was thought that setting up a committee was unnecessary," he said.

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