

Offa armed robbery spree sparks fears

By Romoke W. Ahmad, Ilorin | Publish Date: Apr 7 2018 4:00AM

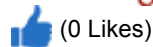
• Over 20 feared killed in deadly attacks

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Residents in Offa, Kwara State, are clamouring for a review of the security architecture for banks in the state, as alarming details emerge on daredevil attacks on five banks, during which over 17 persons were killed.

A survivor of one of the attacks, said he hid inside one of the banks. Still in shock, he struggled to share his ordeal, but was at a loss for words.

The Olofa of Offa, Oba Muftau Gbadamosi, too, was shaken, and told Daily Trust that he could not comment for now.

Offa community itself was in sober mood yesterday as it was learnt that a colloquium on the community, earlier scheduled for today (Saturday) had to be postponed. Also, leaders of the community spent most of yesterday in consultations while a larger, all-embracing meeting involving all indigenes has been slated for April 29.

There were also reports that the robbers, in their bid to escape from Kwara, also killed two mobile policemen in Okuku, Osun State, while they also reportedly abandoned three vehicles they used in their deadly heist.

Spokesman for the state police command, Ajayi Okasanmi, a Deputy Superintendent of Police, confirmed yesterday that nine policemen were killed during the Thursday attack, along with seven civilians. However unconfirmed reports indicated that the casualty figure has risen to 23.

Residents in Offa are increasingly fearful of activities they once carried out daily, for fear of such attacks.

A NEC member of the Nigerian Labour Congress, Comrade Issa Aremu, commiserated with Kwara State government, Olofa of Offa and the people of Offa. "We share the grief of the victims. This singular tragic event is another rude reminder of the urgent need to secure lives and properties in Nigeria. We also call for adequate compensation for the victims of the robbery attack that include policemen," he said.

"This unfortunate development must task all citizens to stop politicizing security issues while politicization of the approval of \$1billion for the army against Boko Haram insurgency and violent crimes across the country is unnecessary and unhelpful," he said.

A security expert and Chief Executive Officer of PlaySafe Lifecare Foundation, Mr. Banjo Famuyiwa, queried the numerical strength of the police in the community, given its population and number of banks. He said: "The number of policemen available to the community is low given the population and number of banks. The police post is also very close to the road; there are no strong barriers, once you branch off the road the next thing is the station. Also in some countries, you allow banks to use their personal security and I think we should do the same here instead of wasting the lives of our policemen again and again. There should be no law that forbid banks from having their own security."

Also, an Ilorin-based group, Kwara Rebirth Ambassadors in a statement in the state capital, demanded an overhaul of the security architecture of the state. The statement was signed by Abdulrasheed Akogun, and Ibrahim Sheriff. It reads in part: "The well-coordinated bank robberies in Offa are callous, unacceptable, and condemnable. Our hearts are with the good people of Offa in this trying period. It has left in its trail, several salient questions begging for answers, and it won't be out of place to demand for a complete overhaul of the security architecture of the state, as armed bandits have severally proven the porosity and poor policing of our inter-state borders."

"A visit to Osun, Ondo, Lagos, Ekiti and other states, will see the strategic positioning of Armoured Personnel Carriers all over. That is a clear show of readiness to combat security challenges. But armed bandits, violent cultists, touts and thugs have combined to hold [Kwara] to ransom in the last 10 days," the statement said. It added: "The Baboko, Sango and Offa incidents where cultist, touts and armed bandits operated freely is a pointer to the confidence criminals now have. It is sad how Kwara has transformed from being known as one of the most peaceful states in Nigeria, to one plagued by criminal elements."

The statement also said the incidents have exposed how government never learns from history. "We demand the arrest and prosecution of the blood-sucking armed bandits, arms mop-up, clampdown on thugs, cultists and all other violent groups. Above all, those arrested must be brought to book and made to face the full wrath of the law without fear or favour."

Also speaking on the development, Comrade Taiwo Otitolaye, Executive Director of Community Outreach for Development and Welfare Advocacy (CODWA) said not just residents of Offa, or citizens of Kwara, but all Nigerians, should be worried. "It has become a recurring decimal plaguing the state. The banks in Omu-Aran Irepodun local government have permanently closed their doors to customers for fear of being attacked and robbed. Our findings show that the police personnel fled for their lives in the case of Offa. The government at all levels has paid lip service to the safety of lives and property, and the Buhari government is even confused on how to go about security issues in Nigeria," he said.

Otitolaye also described the situation as "shameless". He said, also, that it is an irresponsible government that parades itself as custodian of the security of her citizenry when it has failed from all fronts.