

NEWS

I Saw Abducted ABU Lecturer, Boys Trained As Bandits – Freed Captive

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For 12 days, a resident of Kaduna (name withheld) abducted by bandits along Kaduna-Birnin Gwari highway received beatings and watched as those with no means of reaching their relatives were killed. He speaks to Daily Trust on coming in contact with ABU Professor Ibrahim Bako, who was abducted a month ago (reportedly released, too), following the killing of one Kachalla, or Nakachalla, the leader of the bandits, over the weekend. Excerpts:

Briefly narrate how you were abducted?

I will first say Innalillahi wa ina ilaihi rajiun (from Allah we come and to Him we shall return). I was travelling alone in my car along Kaduna-Birnin Gwari road and just after Buruku, near a junction called Rumanan Gwari, armed men opened fire on my car forcing me to stop. They immediately surrounded the car; they were well-armed. As I came out, they started beating me. I went on my knees, they dragged me into the forest along with other abducted travellers. We walked for about three kilometres then spotted their motorcycles. We moved for over one hour on motorcycles and

arrived at a hilly area which is their camp and they kept us there chained.

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They beat us mercilessly during interrogation; they wanted to know what properties we possessed. I did my best to explain who I was and what I had. They told us the beating was not because we had offended them but because they wanted us to know they were desperate to get money.

How many bandits were in the camp?

There were many of them, over 20; some old and some young. They have an administration and there is a hierarchy. I introduced myself; told them where I lived and what I owned and they told me that it was important for me to tell my relatives to sell my properties and bring N50 million to them. They assured me that I would be released the very day the money was paid to them. So, I did my best to tell my relatives to sell my properties and negotiation started. The ransom was reduced to N20 million and reduced again. But because the money was not raised immediately, we were beaten daily.

I stayed for 12 days before I was freed. What puzzled me was the fact that during my stay, the bandits told us that they wanted better lives and did not choose to be bandits. They told us that many of their members have been killed and their properties destroyed and they have dependents, so they decided to join banditry. They said if the government wanted peace, it must realize that they are also Nigerians and the government and security agents should negotiate with them. They said as long as government continued to call them bandits and viewed them with contempt, they would also act like

bandits.

Was anyone killed while you were in captivity?

Of course, they killed people to show us they meant business. The first person they killed when we arrived at the camp was an elderly man who didn't have a phone and because of that, there was no means of contacting his relatives, therefore, they said he was useless to them and couldn't feed him for free. Their leader asked that he be killed. They shot him dead.

They asked three of us to move the corpse afar and dump it for animals to feed on. A few days later, they couldn't locate another man's phone even though he said they took it from him during the abduction. He was not able to speak with his relatives but he later produced the number of a relative who offered N100,000 to the bandits. They rejected it and said it was insulting, so he was killed.

A few days later some of us were led into the forest to get firewood. We noticed the remains of the people killed had been devoured by animals. The bandits also told us that anyone who attempted anything stupid will meet the same fate.

How were you eventually released?

From N50 million, the negotiations came down to N4 million which my relatives were able to raise. On the day I was to be released, the bandits told me they were going to collect the ransom money and that if it was complete, I would be released. Hours later, I was told to remove one of my clothes because I was wearing two. They tore it with a sword and used one part to cover my face. They started two motorcycles and I was sandwiched between two of the bandits on one of them. We rode through the forest for hours. There were times we got to rivers and I will come down and one of

the bandits would guide me across the river. While passing through villages, they would make sure I did not alert the villagers.

We moved like that for hours until we arrived at our destination where they removed the covering on my face and asked if I recognized the person who brought the ransom. I said I did, so they asked me to follow him and wished us a safe journey.

Did you recognise where they dropped you off?

It was around Sabon Birni, in the forest around Rigachikun area of Kaduna. It was along the road that will take you to Dogon Dawa.

Did your relatives sell your properties to raise the ransom money?

I didn't have the money the bandits demanded but I had two houses in the village and so one of them was sold. The villagers were reluctant to buy it because they didn't want to be looked upon as benefiting from another person's misfortune. The house was sold for less than N1 million, most of the money for the ransom came from contributions from relatives.

How long have you been home?

I came back home on Saturday, December 19, 2020.

What happened to the car you abandoned along Kaduna-Birnin Gwari road?

At the time I was abducted, I asked them whether to go with my keys and they said whichever I wanted, but already, I had stepped out of the car with the keys so I left with them.

The leader of the bandits, called Nakachalla, later took the keys from me

and asked me where the car was and I told him it was where we had left it.

On the day I was to be released, I asked them for the keys but they told me that they were in Nakachalla's possession and he had travelled.

I was later shown the car parked at Buruku police station along Kaduna-Birnin Gwari Highway.

How many other victims did you leave in the camp?

I left three people but I'm not sure if two of them will survive. They said they were from a village called Badarawa around Shinkafi in Zamfara State.

There was no [telephone] network in their village and so they would call a relative in Kano or Lagos who would then call someone close to their village and ask them to get a relative to a reception area to speak with them.

Initially, the bandits had negotiated N300,000 for the two of them and later agreed they could pay N200,000 but in the end, the relatives said they could only pay N100,000.

At the time I was released, the murmuring among the bandits was that they were waiting for Nakachalla to return and kill them.

This Nakachalla, how would you describe him?

He was a young man, not more than 35 years and the leader there. That is all I can say.

What were you fed during your captivity?

For the 12 days, we ate spaghetti twice a day. There was nothing other than that. We were given little water to drink but not enough for ablution. We were not allowed to say our five daily prayers, we only prayed in our hearts.

Were there women bandits among them?

We found two female victims and we were abducted with one female but they didn't beat the women, they did the cooking.

There were no women among the bandits but there were armed kids between 10 and 15 years who would look at us with disgust.

Did you recognize anyone among the other victims?

The ABU professor that was abducted was there. They had requested N10 million as ransom but N2 million was paid.

They insisted that the N2 million paid was for the food they fed him and for the bullets they wasted while exchanging fire with security agents during his abduction.

They were still waiting for N8 million to release him. He told me he had no means of getting that money and asked me to go to the institution and beg them to get a loan even if it was salary advance.

What was his condition like?

Not too good, he was there before me and so you can imagine the condition of a man who had not taken his bath for a month, and slept on the ground.

He was beaten often and had dried blood all over him. I noticed his left

hand was not fully functional and this is someone who is more than 60 years old.

I hope government would do something about him. They should get him out of that place.

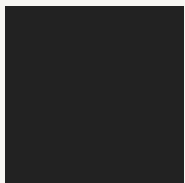
What advice would you want to give to government?

Based on my observation, I don't think government has any wisdom or strategy to end this thing and so for me, the best way is to reach out to these people and negotiate so that people in the remote villages can have peace.

The bandits around Birnin Gwari have made it clear that they would not leave the area, anyone who is travelling to Birnin Gwari from Kaduna or going to Kaduna from Birnin Gwari is in danger.

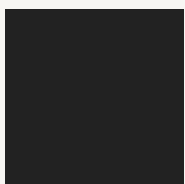
Some people may find an alternative route but we don't have any.

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