

Amotekun goes berserk, kills 11 in 3 weeks

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Controversy has continued to trail the setting up of the Western Nigeria Security Network (WNSN) popularly known as Amotekun following allegations of abuse against the initiative even as some states in the South-West continue to dilly-dally about it, *Daily Trust* can report.

The Amnesty International, human rights activists and some lawyers yesterday urged the federal authorities to call to order those behind Amotekun before the operations of the security outfit further degenerate to a militia group.

The issues surrounding the Amotekun operations appeared more disturbing especially in Oyo State, where the operatives are wielding dangerous weapons including guns during their operations.

Many people have been killed by Amotekun operatives even as their political leaders continued to live in denial while defending or justifying their activities.

The latest incident was the Wednesday's killing of another 21-year-old student, Tosin Thomas, in Ibadan, less than 24-hours after Governor Seyi Makinde defended the operatives of Amotekun when he insisted that they did not kill some innocent Fulani herders.

Speaking on the killing, the Police Public Relations Officer in the state, Olugbenga Fadeyi, yesterday confirmed in a statement in Ibadan that an Amotekun operative was responsible for the killing of the student at a Total Filling Station at Mokola roundabout in the evening.

The commandant of Amotekun, Col. Olayanj Olayinka (rtd), confirmed the incident yesterday.

Mr Olayinka, however, said the operative, who shot the deceased, has been dismissed and handed over to police.

Daily Trust gathered in the build-up to the killing, two young men had a misunderstanding, which led to one of them inviting men of Amotekun to the venue.

The source said when the operative got to the venue, he did not engage them before he fired the gunshots which hit the deceased.

The Amotekun operatives have reportedly killed 11 people within three weeks in Oyo State.

Daily Trust reports that on December 24, 2020, the National Association of Nigerian Students (NANS) accused members of Amotekun deployed in Oyo town of killing a 400-level student of the University of Ibadan, Akolade Gbadebo.

Also, on January 3, a member of the corps, Ibrahim Ogundele, allegedly shot Fatai Yekini, also

an officer of the Amotekun corps, at Isale-Oyo area of Oyo, as Special Police Constabulary attached to Ojongbodu Police Station.

On Saturday, three Fulani residents of the state were allegedly killed by the Amotekun corps in Okebi, Tapa area of Ibarapa Central Local Government Area of the state.

However, a family head, Mogaji Wale Oladoja, cautioned members of the public not to change the narrative of the incident, adding that it is unfair to turn it into a tribal war.

He said Yoruba and Hausa people have been living peacefully for many years without crisis, adding "inter-marriages have been happening between them from time immemorial."

According to him, "We don't have to turn this to ethnicity war for no reason. Almost 10 people were killed in that area in less than a week and you expect security men to fold their arms. Let's be reasonable."

On their activities, Oladoja said; "If not for the Amotekun, those hoodlums could have hijacked the state from the people. Those Amotekun people are really working since the police stopped working after the #EndSARS protest. They are really helping us."

We are not against Amotekun but...Fulani group

The Sarkin Fulani of Oyo State, Alhaji Saliu Abdulkadir, said his people were not in any way opposed to the activities of Amotekun but the operation must follow due process and they must respect human rights.

He insisted that the incident of Saturday where a prominent Fulani member identified as Alhaji Usman Okebi and two of his sons were killed was an attack on innocent herders in the community.

"They said they were kidnappers yet you met them in their residence. This was a man who was preparing for the wedding of his children, which was to take place that day. It is sad indeed," he said.

He said Amotekun should have arrested them and handed them over to the police instead of killing them on mere suspicion that they were kidnappers.

However, the state Commander, Col. Olayanj Olayinka said men of Amotekun were well trained, adding that the law that established the outfit empowered them to use weapons.

Amotekun disturbing activities
International - Amnesty

Commenting on the development, Amnesty International said it is "concerned about recent allegations against Amotekun."

A statement last night signed by Ms Osai Ojigbo, Director, Amnesty International Nigeria, said, "The allegations (of killings) must be investigated to

ensure accountability.

"Amotekun must not become human rights abusers like the police. Amotekun emerged due to people's dissatisfaction with how the Nigerian security agents were responding to proven cases of conflicts and attacks in their region. But such bodies must be properly defined by law and their roles must be clearly elucidated and human rights should be the governing principle.

"As long as human rights are not the foundation, there would always be that risk of abuse. The same complaint we have against the federal police, we would also have with any other; so, the core thing is for the stakeholders to be clear from the beginning about how this security outfit would bring safety and security, using international human rights standards. That is the only way it can be effective," the statement said.

Operatives trained with neo-colonial methods - Falana

Reacting, a human rights lawyer, Femi Falana (SAN) said the operatives of Amotekun are being trained by retired military and police personnel with a neo-colonial background.

"The teachers have total contempt for people. Hence, the operatives are engaged in horrendous human rights of the people. The central command of Amotekun should be constituted by accredited representatives of mass organisations and funded by state governments," he said.

Also reacting, the Executive Director of the Citizens Advocacy for Social and Economic Rights (CASER), Frank Tietie attributed the reports of human rights abuses by Amotekun to the socio-cultural environment of the country in which the outfit operates.

Making a distinction with the colonial policing system, which was oppressively meant to protect the exploitative interest of the colonial masters, Tietie said the cultural practice of security in the country is such that the offender is to be dehumanised and paraded in the streets.

"What we are experiencing with these stories we hear about Amotekun violating human rights is expected naturally from an arrangement that is predominantly influenced by socio-cultural considerations, which disregards human rights," he said.

Another human rights activist, Mr Jaye Gaskia, wondered why Amotekun operatives bear arms when the federal government has not licensed any state to arm its security network.

While maintaining that the idea of creating Amotekun was a laudable one, Gaskia said, "The first thing is to be clear about one thing on security, particularly internal security, it is basically the responsibility of the federal government.

"But the constitution also says that the state assemblies also

have powers to legislate for the peace and the good governance of the state. So, in a sense, it is a shared responsibility.

"The problem with what is happening right now is that, setting up Amotekun as a security network in the South West, for instance, is probably a step in the right direction.

"It goes beyond simply setting up an agency; it is more important to put systems in place. When you have a state that traditionally violates the rights of citizens, it doesn't matter what new agency you set up, if you don't change that character, this is what is going to be happening.

"So, what we have is that we have Amotekun and the personnel are hardly trained, they hardly have any orientation. They are trained like the way you train all these private security guards. There is no human rights component to their training.

"We have not seen a human rights curriculum in terms of any training of their personnel. So that is the problem that we have at the moment right now. And then again, we also have to answer the question of how come the Amotekun personnel are killing people because they are not supposed to be carrying arms, and the right to bear arms is a federal right. I am not aware that the federal government has granted any state licence for their security networks to carry arms.

"These, for me, are issues and more importantly, you can't take people's life simply without a jury, without the accusation, without adjudication. You can't be the judge or the jury or the accuser yourself. That is absolutely the same thing the police were doing. And now, we are transferring it to the various security networks that are emerging across the country," he said.

The coming of Amotekun

Amotekun was inaugurated on January 9, 2020, in Ibadan, the Oyo State capital, by the Western Nigeria Governors' Forum led by Governor Rotimi Akeredolu of Ondo State.

It was a response to what the governors called escalating insecurity in the region with many stakeholders calling on them to find a lasting solution to the impasse.

After the inauguration of the security outfit, there was uncertainty in the region as Amotekun could not take off immediately casting doubt on the commitment of the governors to drive the initiative.

It took six months before the Amotekun corps took off in states like Oyo, Ondo, Ekiti and Osun but it has remained unclear when the initiative would commence in Lagos.

The Majority Leader of Osun State House of Assembly, Tunde Olatunji, said the Amotekun operatives can carry certain categories of firearms.

"Even individuals can get licence and own firearms. Some of the operatives already have licence for their arms even before the establishment of Amotekun.

"In Osun, Amotekun operatives can carry firearms as the law that established the corps permits it. However, we have a lot of mechanisms to check them and avoid misuse. More so, the Nigeria constitution stipulates punishment for misuse of firearms," he said.

The Amotekun Corps Commander in Ekiti State, Brig. Gen. Joe Komolafe (rtd), said the corps is working hard to curb crimes in the state.

In Ondo, the Commander of Amotekun corps, Chief Adetunji Adeleye, said though the corps is working with other security agencies, the Amotekun Law 2020 in Ondo State allows the operatives to carry arms.

Amotekun like no other

Daily Trust reports that many states have civil security outfits like KAROTA (Kano), KASTLEA (Kaduna), and Civilian JTF (Borno) that are complementing the works of police and civil defence but they are not allowed to carry arms. There were also no much complaints after their formation because they were restricted to individual states.

However, in early 2020, shortly after the launching of Amotekun, the Attorney-General of the Federation and Minister of Justice, Abubakar Malami, declared the regional security outfit illegal.

He said no state government, whether singly or in a group, has the legal right and competence to establish any form of organisation or agency for the defence of Nigeria or any of its constituent parts.

He said if his office had been consulted, it would have given the "proper information and guidance to ensure that Nigeria's defence and corporate entity are preserved at all times."

He noted that Nigeria is a sovereign entity governed by laws meant to sustain its corporate existence as a constitutional democracy.

Analysts believed that Malami made the statement because the framers of Amotekun wanted it to be a regional outfit.

After back and forth, most of the governors went back to their state and submitted bills to their houses of assembly for the establishment of Amotekun.

In December 2020, a retired Inspector General of Police, Sunday Ehindero urged Amotekun operatives to strictly adhere to the country's constitution that forbids them from bearing fire-arm in the course of their operation.

Ehindero said the regional corps was to be an information and intelligence gathering outfit rather than an arm carrying one, stressing that the law that established the outfit doesn't make provision for it to be arm-bearing.