

How Shooting Incidents Led To Closure Of Maiduguri's Illicit Drug Market

Maiduguri-City-Gate



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Fri Jan 29 2021



Shooting incidents in which soldiers and some civilians were killed as well as other related violent crimes have led to the closure of an illegal drug market in Maiduguri, Borno State.

The two incidents occurred almost one month apart: the last one happened on January 17.

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People dealing in illegal drugs and related substances constituted majority of the traders at the Barka da Zuwa Lane or Bayan Layi along Baga Road Maiduguri. There were gambling stalls, food vendors, retail shops and before now, drinking places and brothels in the area.

Though there were people who frequented the area for genuine businesses, others were female sex workers and drug addicts who were there to lose control of their faculties.

Violent crimes involving young people regularly occurred in the area, close to a market place, which forced the state government to demolish all illegal structures including brothels and beer parlours there while many drug pushers and supplies were also apprehended last year.

"This was done by the government mainly to scare away troublemakers and stop the consumption of illicit substances and drugs that require medical prescription. The illicit drug market and trade are threats to security," one eyewitness said.

But few days after the demolition exercise last year, drug suppliers, female sex workers as well as gambling fully returned to the area.

Most of the crimes perpetrated in the area involve the use of firearms and more than a few people fell victims to gun violence in the last couple of years, he said.

In December last year, Kanem Trust reported that a soldier had shot dead his colleague there after an argument. The cause of the disagreement was not ascertained but the accused was said to have fired harmless shots into the air before he turned the rifle on the deceased. The suspect, who was said to have been under the influence of hard drugs, was arrested and handed over to military police.

Another incident, which involved a soldier, happened in the second week of January 2021, barely a month after.

"The shooting incident, which left many people dead including a soldier, was a tragedy that continues to generate wide spread condemnation both within the civilian population and the armed forces," said an eyewitness, Baana Mele.

More than five people and the soldier were shot dead while few people were admitted to the hospital with gunshot wounds, the witness stated.

"An angry argument must have ensued between the soldier and some youths before he opened fire on them. There were people above suspicion who were hit by stray bullets; some died at the hospital. The soldier was also killed and it was alleged that his rifle was missing."

The incident, he said, happened around 9 pm and shortly after the area was deserted and in the next morning, a patrol headed by a captain as well as members of the Civilian Joint Task Force cordoned off the scene.

An official of the market close to Barka da Zuwa said some of the drug suppliers who left the crime scene after the shooting incident relocated to three stalls at the market place.

"We have traced and demolished the stalls and asked them to stay away from the market," he said.

On why soldiers were involved in shooting incidences, one soldier who preferred not to be named said soldiers who "overstayed in the theatre of war, at least over four years, needed to return to barracks where their activities will be coordinated; they should be regimented.

"Again, there are criminal elements in the society who would attempt to snatch a gun from a soldier if he is alone and he will definitely resist."

Sources said Governor Zulum had ordered the closure of the area as well as similar locations in Maiduguri.

Army authorities in Maiduguri have yet to speak on the matter.