

# I saw bandits kill victims, feed dogs to feast on – Prof Aliyu

Professor Aliyu Mohammed is the Head of Department Crop Production at the Abubakar Tafawa Balewa University (ATBU) Bauchi. He was recently kidnapped and spent 25 days in the hands of his abductors. In this interview, he narrated his torments and the heinous acts he saw. Excerpts:

Aliyu Babankarfi (Zaria) & Dalhatu Liman (Abuja)

**H**ow you were abducted?  
I came back home around 9:30pm, subsequently my son too came back and had parked his car and went out. I was charging my cell phone inside the car and I went to pick it up. It's been my routine to check around before I go to bed in order to ensure all is well.

Whilst I was checking round holding my phone, all of a sudden, I saw gunmen coming towards my house and I had nowhere to escape to. They pounced on me, beating and hitting me with machetes. Thereafter, they forced me down and said they would enter my house. It's then that my family heard me screaming and they hid inside the kitchen. When they got inside, they didn't meet anyone except my son Abdul'aziz who they instantly killed. They shattered everything that's valuable. They tried to open the backdoor thinking that my family escaped through, but it didn't open so they came and picked me up. With the gunshots by soldiers and police and vigilantes they seemed helpless until they whisked me away. They shot one of my sons, who came back home on a motorcycle, but he survived it.

Did they come to your house by foot or on vehicle?

They all came on foot and about 15 stormed my house each wielding a gun. As they were taking me away, I then learnt they were more than 30, as others lurked around to forestall any possible help from individuals.

Can you recall how many kilometres you trekked?

We trekked through bushes from 10pm until 1:30am when they asked me if I recognise a certain light far away? I said no. They said it was the streetlight of Jaji. Then they brought two motorcycles and four of us mounted one with each of them wielding a gun. We continued moving until daybreak when we reached their hut.

How was life there?

It was a miserable life. Immediately we reached the den, I was chained several times. We got beaten up. They said they would give us morning and evening tea. They told me that they were told that I am affluent, I had estates, cars, cattle and many sources of making money so I would pay a ransom of N20m. I told them I am not rich and I only possessed the house I am residing in. They disagreed with me saying before they pick up a person, they would be sure of his wealth, and that they were also told that I have an in-law who is a younger brother to Albani working with the NNPC, hence he must be affluent. They kept me in tormenting conditions. Every evening we would be set free and asked to go and fetch firewood with which our meal is prepared and they used same to warm their bodies.



■ Professor Aliyu Mohammed

Members of my family, friends and well-wishers raised N10m which they said is half of what they demanded. They asked my younger brother who brought the money to go back alone that I won't be set free. So, I spent another 15 days with them whilst efforts were being made to raise the remaining balance of N10m as they demanded.

Whenever their leader visited, we would be released to go and greet him. One day when we went to greet him, he pointed at me saying by God's will I would be set free that day because they had been communicating with my younger brother and the amount had been raised. When my people came to pick me, I was kept inside a hut and the ransom collectors went ahead and collected and counted the money, then they asked that I be brought outside. They bid me farewell saying, 'Professor, we are going to miss you. We wanted you to be with us. You should be praying for us; may you have a safe journey. Here is the route that will take you to Galadimawa.'

Already, my in-law, who was waiting nearby with a car picked me to hospital where I was treated for the bruises and cuts I had on my head.

When you were taken to their den, how many victims did you find there?

The day I was kidnapped I didn't see any abducted person there until the next

day that one person was brought and after six days, three other victims were brought in.

Did you leave the other victims behind?

No, one was set free before me, but they killed two people before I was released. There was one Alhaji Kadade who was brought there a day after I was kidnapped. They had a contention with his brothers after they demanded N3.5m as his ransom, and they sought a discount and subsequently paid N3m. They said that their victim's brothers had played their intelligence. After they paid the ransom, the next evening, they took him to a valley and shot him dead. They warned me that if I exhibited lack of seriousness, I will have the same fate.

Six days later, they brought three other persons. One of them was my neighbour, one Saleh, a student, and one Umaru Dan Sintiri. I overheard the kidnappers murmuring that there's a leader of a vigilante group and once he is brought to them they won't hesitate to kill him. By sunset they all swooped on him with beatings until he breathed his last. His remains spent the night in front of our hut. In the morning, they asked us to remove his remains and showed us where to dump the body. They told us that every one of us who displayed lack of commitment would have the same fate,

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saying that they kidnapped us for money, if there's no ransom we'd be killed.

I pleaded with them to allow me even alone to dig grave and bury him; they insisted that we should dump him like that for dogs to feast on. And that's how the body was dumped.

How would you describe their (bandits) life?

There's no way living in the bush could be blissful. Even if you have money, there is no way to enjoy the money. It's obvious that they are making money but there's no school, no market, nor any other luxury things to spend the money on. They said that they couldn't enter towns and cities except they are on robbery mission. So, that is how they live their life. They even stopped me from observing my prayers. So, I said to myself that is all, as I had already not been taking bath, no haircut, no cutting nails and no prayers throughout the 25 days I spent in captivity.

How do we get rid of kidnappings and banditry?

What they told me from the discussions we had is that the government is not fair to them to the extent that they couldn't even go to markets and even rural areas. Wherever a Fulani man is seen, he is deemed a criminal and they get beaten up, killed or ill-treated. This made them feel marginalised in the affairs of Nigeria. That it forced them to regroup into the forest to live their own life. But as they said, they are ready for dialogue to resolve the stand-off.

If the government is thinking of using lethal force, these people have weaponry at their disposal. For instance, if they come out for operation neither military nor police could prevent them, because the time they abducted me these security forces were shooting; but it didn't stop them from whisking me away. Therefore, my advice is that first, we should resort to prayer for the Almighty to come to our aid.

Secondly, government should understand that these people are well prepared more than what we think; it's either the government reconcile with them as citizens and consider them in national plans, or it should come up with more firepower than theirs as nobody is above the law. As far as I am concerned, they are better prepared than the government forces for now.