

Zamfara: How Kidnapped Chief Imam, Family Members Were Killed By Bandits





The son-in-law of the late chief imam of Maru town in Maru Local Government Area of Zamfara State, Alkali Salisu Suleiman, has provided a chilling account of how the cleric, his two sons, and his two-year-old grandson were brutally murdered by bandits while in captivity.

The chief imam, a retired Shari'a court judge, was abducted alongside 23 others during a violent raid on the Maru community four months ago. Among the captives were a newlywed couple who had barely begun their wedding celebrations.

Nine members of the imam's family, including his wife, three daughters, three sons, and his grandchild, were among those taken.

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Kabiru and Khuzaiifa, the imam's sons, were among those killed.

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Some members of the family, along with other captives, still remain in the hands of the bandits.

The residents expressed little hope for their release despite meeting the demands of their abductors.

Initially, the bandits demanded a ransom of N70 million for the release of the hostages. However, after intense negotiations and prayers, the ransom was reduced to N11 million, which was eventually paid.

At the time of the abduction, the chief imam was reportedly ill, and family members delivered his medicines and clothes to the kidnappers who requested them.

It remains unclear whether the imam died from illness or was executed.

How victims were killed

In a distressing account, Muhammadu (not his real name), the imam's son-in-law, described the horrific conditions and torture the victims were subjected to.

He said, "Baba, my father-in-law, was already sick when he was taken. For a man of his age to witness such cruelty inflicted upon his family, it was too much for him.

"We were told that the imam was killed during the first day of Ramadan, but the bandits didn't inform us. They threatened to kill anyone from the freed hostages who revealed the news."

The most harrowing detail shared by Muhammadu was the fate of his two-year-old son.

"We were told that he cried to death after being tortured with fire.

"The bandits were said to have used a hot stone and pressed it onto his palm while he cried in pain. His cries were unbearable, but they continued their torture.

"He died in front of his grandfather, uncles, and aunts, who could do nothing to save him," he said, choking with emotion.

"The two sons of the imam, Kabiru and Khuzaifa, also suffered similar horrors before being killed alongside three other individuals who had been abducted from neighbouring homes. The

details of their torture remain too disturbing to fully recount,” Muhammad said.

Though devastated by the deaths, the family holds on to hope that the victims will be rewarded in paradise for their suffering.

“We pray that Allah grants them peace and forgiveness. And we hope that the bandits will repent and turn away from violence,” he added.

The tragic news of the deaths, Muhammadu said, was conveyed by a female abductee who had recently escaped captivity.

“She confirmed the killings and detailed the brutal treatment the victims suffered.

“The bandits had warned those released not to reveal the deaths to the families of the victims under threat of further violence.

“But the woman invited us to her sick bed and narrated everything to us,” he said.

A funeral prayer was held for the slain victims in absentia on Tuesday, because their bodies were not yet recovered.

Attacks on Maru community

The murder of the chief imam and his family is part of a broader wave of violence sweeping Zamfara State.

Recent reports indicate that bandits have killed at least 28 people in a series of coordinated assaults across the Maru Local Government Area, with numerous shops, vehicles, and livestock being destroyed or stolen.

On Tuesday, bandits attacked Yar Tashar Sahabi village, setting shops ablaze and looting animals.

The attack is believed to be in retaliation for an ambush by local vigilantes, who had recently killed several bandits and recovered stolen cattle.

Elsewhere, coordinated attacks on Gobirawa Chali, Damaga, and Lugga communities resulted in the deaths of at least 28 people, with 21 fatalities reported from a mining site in Gobirawa Chali.

Amnesty International confirmed the deaths, and reports from locals described how gunmen stormed the area, opening fire indiscriminately.

The military quickly responded, deploying both ground forces and aerial support, which helped limit the number of casualties.

Zamfara State Police spokesman, DSP Yazid Abubakar, said he had yet to receive official confirmation on the death of the chief imam and his family members.