

Anambra: Police Kill 8, Arrest 38

135 Motorcycles, 8 firearms Recovered; MASSOB Denies Involvement

FROM CHUKS COLLINS (AWKA) AND
GBENGA AKINFENWA (ONITSHA)

RESIDENTS, visitors and passers-by in Anambra State woke up last Tuesday, to a heavy presence of armed security details

comprising soldiers, SSS, mobile and regular police officers at virtually all streets and junctions known to be flashpoints and places

with heavy human/vehicular traffic.

The officers systematically picked and frisked road users, particularly those on *okada* commercial motorcycles and on foot.

The operation, which took citizens unawares, according to the Commissioner of Police, Mr. John Haruna, was so planned to avoid information leaks, which could negatively affect the objective of

the procedure.

He told journalists in his office yesterday that it would be sustained until all criminals, brigands and anti-social elements

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8 killed, 38 Arrested In Anambra

clearly show a direct relationship and pattern between MASSOB and armed robberies."

Particular attention is being paid to those walking the streets and those on *okada* because, in his words, more of the daring criminal activities in the state were observed to have been carried out by men on the commercial motorcycles.

He confirmed that the routing of the miscreants by the security personnel, since the initial crackdown operations began few weeks ago, gave them (hoodlums) so much heat that they ran out of the state to Okigwe in Imo State.

According to a security report, the criminals went "for training, only to return between August 18 and 22, 2006, fully mobilised and motivated to continue to unleash terror on citizens of Anambra State."

"But unfortunately, they met an equally rejuvenated security team, which had taken over their former hide-outs, thereby keeping them stranded and more vulnerable," Haruna said.

It was during a gun-battle to recover their (bandits') abodes from the police that five of them were gunned

down, while another died during a fight with landlords/tenants at the Akpaka forest area of Onitsha where they launched an unsuccessful attempt to continue extortion of money and ransom from residents.

One of the local gang leaders was killed in another resistance fight with youths and residents/landlords of Fegge area, Onitsha South Council, at Silas Works road.

Two were also killed by a gang, which had been terrorising citizens of Onitsha and operated on *okada* in in-land town area of Onitsha at weekend.

There was an instance where three shop attendants were killed in a particular operation, without the killers taking a pin from the shop, which gave indication that the act was a vendetta and/or to instill fears into the residents to discourage them from reporting to or helping the police.

Haruna confirmed the bursting of a highway robbery gang, which way-laid, robbed and killed some Onitsha-bound luxury bus passengers from one of the northern states.

Police action, he said, was through a tip-off by witnesses and victims, at the Aromma Junction area.

The robbers, who reportedly opened fire when they were interrupted, were forced to abandon their vehicle, which was stocked with the victims' bags.

The robbers quickly snatched another car but were chased to a standstill on their way towards Nnewi, where the police overwhelmed them.

Bank robberies,

according to the police, have sharply dropped since the crackdown on crimes in the state.

In the effort to check and sustain the tempo of success, Haruna appealed to the citizens to co-operate with the police by availing them information, and to also rise up against activities of organisations like MASSOB. Police said that nearly 95 per cent of such persons had been found to be non-natives of Anambra State.

He thanked the citizens, especially landlords and some youth organisations that had resisted and fought the social misfits to a standstill.

The Police Commissioner said that officers in the state had been mobilised towards this operation, adding that about 10 per cent of the 3,000 officers approved for immediate transfer by the Inspector General of Police, Mr. Sunday Ehindero had been effected, beginning with those of senior ranks.

However, MASSOB's Deputy Director of Information (South-east), David MacDavid, wondered why criminals would be arrested in the state and would be named as MASSOB members, adding that the law-abiding attitude of the Movement should not be mistaken for weakness.

He noted that the alleged criminals are genuine Igbo youths involved in commercial motorcycle business, an opportunity, he alleged the police had used to arrest them in order to make money.

MacDavid challenged the Police Commissioner to come out with his facts and fig-

ures that those arrested are MASSOB members, "because it is worldly known that MASSOB is a peaceful organisation that carries no arm."

He stressed that the affairs of the Igbo youth and Igbo people in general was the concern of MASSOB "because Igbo elders can no longer speak for the Igbo people."

He said: "If the Commissioner of Police is insinuating that the people causing mayhem are MASSOB, what about the rampant robbery incidents in Onitsha that has not been addressed by the police? Are the robbers also MASSOB?"

The Movement spokesman alleged that the police and the joint military personnel had done more harm to Anambra State by extorting money and making life unbearable for the People.

MacDavid queried: "What has Haruna come to Anambra to do? Is it to cause more mayhem or ethnic and tribal war?"

"The NARTO people are back at the parks, the Commissioner of Police did not see this. The agents of government should stop blackmailing MASSOB because it was obvious at the wake of the crises that NARTO caused the mayhem."

He appealed to religious and Igbo leaders to intervene in the situation and save Igbo from being wiped out.

Stressing that MASSOB maintains its non-violence move towards the actualisation of Biafra, MacDavid called on members to continue in their struggle.

prize

"The science committee," he maintained, "is in agreement with the judges and the very high standards the winner must meet (70 per cent cut-off mark) set for the prestigious award."

Dr. Chris Haynes, managing director, Nigeria LNG Limited