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Gunmen Abduct Ozekhome, Kill Four Policemen

SUNDAY, 25 AUGUST 2013 00:00 BY ALEMMA-OZIORUWA ALIU (BENIN CITY) AND DANIEL ANAZIA (LAGOS) NEWS - NATIONAL



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KIDNAPPERS in Edo State, Saturday afternoon, struck at Ehor, a town near Ekpoma, seizing renowned human rights lawyer, Mike Ozekhome, and killing four policemen in the process.

Confirming the incident, Edo State Commissioner of Police, Folusho Adebajo, said: "Operatives of the command, led by the DPO of Ehor Division, responded swiftly to a distress call at about 3:30pm that an unspecified number of armed men had blocked the Benin-Auchi Road, by Ehor axis. However, the hoodlums ambushed the police patrol vehicle and opened fire on them, prompting an exchange of fire.

"At the end of the gun duel, the hoodlums escaped with bullet wounds but not without their victims who were later identified upon search on the abandoned vehicle as Chief Ozekhome and his driver. Regrettably, the command lost four officers in the encounter.

"We salute their rare courage and bravery. They fought and died as heroes for the cause of humanity. Their death shall not be in vain. We remain undeterred in our fight against armed banditry."

The lawyer was reportedly billed to travel with the convoy of Edo State Governor, Adams Oshiomhole, from Benin City to the governor's hometown, Iyamoh, near Auchi, in Etsako West. He, however, narrowly missed the convoy due to his late arrival from Lagos, where he held a court session earlier in the day.

The kidnappers are yet to make contact with Ozekhome's family.

The lawyer was reportedly stopped by gunmen in a Toyota Hilux van and a Toyota Camry car who fired shots at the front tyre of the Toyota Prado SUV that conveyed him.

The shooting brought Ozekhome's car to a halt, after which the men abducted him and his driver.

The occupants of another Toyota Camry car that approached the scene were also kidnapped. An eyewitness alerted the police at Ehor Division, following which a team, led by the Divisional Police Officer (DPO), swung into action.

The team was, however, ambushed, resulting in the killing of the four policemen. The DPO sustained gunshot wounds to the hand.

Edo police boss, Adebajo, visited the scene and recovered mobile phones from Ozekhome's car.

The police also recovered the lawyer's files, wig and gown. The lawyer's SUV and police bullet-ridden cars were moved to the premises of the Ehor Divisional Police Station.

Meanwhile, the Inspector General of Police, Mohammed Abubakar, has ordered the police in the state to track down the kidnappers and free the victims.

Governor Adams Oshiomhole also called on security agencies in the state to do their best possible to rescue Ozekhome and the others.

In a statement signed by its president, Abdul Mamhud, Public Interest Lawyers League (PILL), an Abuja based non-governmental organisation has condemned the kidnap, faulting growing insecurity in Edo State and the country.

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He urged the kidnappers to release the civil rights lawyer immediately.

It will be recalled that the wife, daughter and driver of Supreme Court Justice, Bode Rhodes-Vivour, were kidnapped in similar circumstances in Benin City, in May this year. They were later released, following the payment of a ransom.

Early July, three members of the gang were among seven suspects paraded by the State Security Services (SSS) in Benin City.

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Author of this article: **By Alemma-Ozioruva Aliu (Benin City) and Daniel Anazia (Lagos)**

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