

## NEWS.

# 2,255 prisoners escaped detention since beginning of insurgency, says NPS

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NOT less than 2,327 prisoners have escaped detention from Nigerian prisons during 15 attacks on 14 facilities since the beginning of the Boko Haram unrest in 2009. The Nigerian Prison Service (NPS) has so far lost 46 of her officers in the course of the security challenge.

It was learnt that of the 56,785 people in the country's 239 prison facilities, 38,743 are on awaiting trial, representing about 80% of the total number of detainees as at June 2014, while 151 foreigners are serving various prison terms and 1,439 others have been sentenced to dead for various crimes committed in Nigeria.

The NPS Public Relations Officer, Ope Fatinikun, made this known yesterday in Abuja while briefing journalists at the Forum of Spokespersons of Security and Response Agencies (FOSSRA) in collaboration with I-Nigeria Initiative. He said although less than 300 of these number have been rearrested, while 15 returned voluntarily, the breakdown shows that prisons in the Northeastern parts of the country were the most affected.

Giving a breakdown in the figures, Fatinikun said only three prison facilities outside the Northeast have been attacked by unknown gunmen, whom he called criminal elements, the remaining 12 in the northeast were attacked by the Boko haram insurgents, "whereas 482 prisoners were released during the Maiduguri Prison attack of 27 July 2009, 489 were released from Bauchi attack of 07th September 2010 and Koton Karfe followed in 2012 February when 119 escaped, but 49 of them were recaptured", 20 from Kumshe in Borno State and 41 inmates at Damaturu in Yobe State in June 2012.



## Nigerian Prisons Service

Also in Maiha in Adamawa State, 35 inmates were released in December 2012, 79 from Maiduguri Farm Centre in January 2013, 118 were released in Gwoza in March 2013, 105 inmates released in Bama prisons in Borno State and 366 prisoners were released in Mubi, Adamawa State in October 2014.

Others are 124 prisoners released from Ganye prisons in Adamawa State in March 2013, while 205 inmates escaped after prisons attacks in Lagos, Ogun and Ondo states.

While lamenting the paucity of necessary operational equipment, which the prison officers need to repel attacks, Fatinikun also stated that the recent Koton Karfe attack, the second after the one in 2012, would not have succeeded if the officers at the facility had had an Armoured Personnel Carrier (APC) and other necessary arms, as the "attackers came armed with grenades, improvised explosive device (IEDs) among others to make good their attack."

Meanwhile, the Gombe State government has ordered the closure of all public and private schools in the state, a day after suspected Boko Haram terrorists attacked two towns in the state.

The News Agency of Nigeria (NAN) reports that parents who took their children to school on yesterday were told to take them back as the schools have been closed on the orders of the government.

The Headmistress of Bethany International College, Gombe, Edith Williams, told NAN that she received a circular on Tuesday evening that all schools should be closed down for security reasons.

Some parents who spoke to journalists commended the state government for the action, saying it was a necessary one to safeguard the students.

One of the parents, Hannatu Musa, said she was happy with the development as it would help to secure the children.

The Permanent Secretary, Gombe Government House, Sani Jauro, confirmed the closure, but denied the state was pressured by Boko Haram attacks. He said it was a "normal mid-term break for students."

Gunmen had on Tuesday attacked Nafada and Ashaka, over 130 kilometres from Gombe, barely a week after suspected terrorists exploded a bomb at a motor park in the state capital.

No fewer than 92 internally displaced persons from Mubi in Adamawa State are currently seeking refuge in Kano.

Kano State Director General of the Hisbah Board, Dr. Abba Sufi, told journalists in Kano that the displaced persons, mainly men, women and children, were conveyed to Kano in vehicles belonging to the Dangote Group.

He said the government has directed proper care be given to the affected persons while the sick among them would be provided with the necessary medication.

Sufi hinted that the state government has also constituted a committee under the chairmanship of the Commissioner for Women Affairs to ensure good welfare for the displaced persons. She has ordered immediate renovation of a rehabilitation centre in Dawakin Kudu for resettlement of the people.

As survivors of the Boko Haram attack on the town of Mubi continued to flee, some victims have recounted their experiences in the hands of the insurgents.

A man who fled to Kano told the BBC Hausa Service in an interview that parents were forced to collect N5,000 and surrender their daughters to the insurgents.

A woman who fled to Kano had said that some planes were shot down during the deadly encounter, while some soldiers who were either dead or seriously injured were seen on the bush paths they took as escape routes.

In Nafada town of Gombe State, the insurgents were said to have wreaked havoc, killing about 25 security agents and a renowned Islamic cleric, Sheik Adam Nasara, together with six of his students.

"They also burned down a police station, a micro- finance bank and the secretariat of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), the ruling party. They also took a lot of guns in Nafada."

The BBC Hausa report said the town of Ashaka was also attacked. A staff of the Ashaka Cement Company had said that the insurgents broke into the company and stole about eight trucks, forced their way into the store and took dynamites which the company was using to break rocks in cement production.

"They loaded the dynamite in the trucks and moved on. The company worker said there were women amongst the fighters, but they did not touch civilians. The security agents are yet to confirm this development."

He said there were gunshots in the town of Bajoga and the people were frightened and fled to other nearby towns.

One of the soldiers who fled told the BBC Hausa Service that four days ago, while they were between Bazza and Michika in Adamawa State, they were informed to be ready and attack Boko Haram.

"They said they are going to fix the bridge. We told them not to do that because that was why the fighters cannot enter Mubi. But they fixed the bridge and we were not provided with weapons. After fixing the bridge, they sent us to fight, about 150 of us, without arms.

"They did not give us the required arms, we needed about 7 APCs, RPC and artillery bombs to enable us confront them and push them back to where they came from. But Wallahi, we had only AK 47 and 2 magazine only, which was inadequate. Our adversaries came with anti-aircraft, AA, the deployed 4 APCs. They had enough weapons, we fought them for about 30 minutes, facing each other from opposite sides. When they realized we were not many, they used that bridge to crush us completely and moved directly to Mubi."

The soldier, however, said the Nigerian troops were brave and could confront enemies on the battlefield. "But if the government did not give us enough weapons, that is a shame, we are doing our best, our superiors are just watching. If they say they don't have, then where are our enemies getting their weapons?

"We fought them for up to an hour, but with an AK 47 and 2 magazine, what will you do if they finish? No APC, no RPG, no nothing. What would you shoot that will hit and affect them? If they shoot their weapons, the sound was as if a rock is being demolished," he said.