

Boko Haram rejects N50m ransom, kills CAN chairman

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- **Buhari, Atiku, Amnesty, others condemn murder**
- **‘ Insurgents neither defeated nor suppressed’**

Outrage yesterday trailed the murder of the Chairman of the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) in Michika Local Government Area of Adamawa State, Rev. Lawan Andimi after Boko Haram insurgents who kidnapped him rejected a N50 million ransom.

The state CAN chairman, Bishop Dami Mamza, who broke the sad news to some journalists in Yola, said that the insurgents had demanded two million euros (about N50 million) and still went ahead to kill the innocent cleric.

Bishop Mamza, who said that the killing was communicated to them through their contact, added that another pastor was abducted and killed almost at the same time with the kidnapped and murdered cleric from Michika.

Mamza said that Boko Haram had not been defeated or suppressed, asking the government to tell Nigerians the truth.

“Negotiations were still ongoing when they stopped calling. They were offered N50 million but they rejected it. They called his wife last week, informing her that they would be beheading him (Andimi) on Saturday, but somehow, they waited till Monday.”

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The state CAN chairman lamented the constant attacks on Christians in the country, citing the killing of Pastor Dennis Bagauri of the Lutheran Church in Mayo-Belwa area by suspected kidnappers on Sunday.

President Muhammadu Buhari condemned the killing of Andimi, describing it as cruel, inhuman and deliberately provocative.

In his reaction to the incident, President Buhari expressed sorrow that the terrorists went on to kill the religious leader while giving signals at the same time of a willingness to set him free by releasing him to third parties.

Buhari condoled with the Christian community all over Nigeria, the government and people of Adamawa State and the bishop’s family over the sad loss of the cleric. He promised that terrorists would continue to pay a heavy price for their actions and would comprehensively be defeated by the armed forces.

The president urged nations of the world to end all support provided to Boko Haram and Islam in West Africa (ISWA) terrorist groups whose only goal is to sow death, violence, and destruction in the sub-region.

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Former Vice President, Atiku Abubakar, condemned the killing and called for the recalibration of the country's security system.

Atiku, who spoke yesterday on his official twitter handle, said: "This development saddens me. There's a compelling need to recalibrate our security architecture. I sympathise with the family of Andimi and the entire body of CAN in Nigeria. May the soul of the deceased rest in peace."

Amnesty International also condemned the killing of the clerics, saying the situation "is appalling."

The Director of Amnesty International Nigeria, Osai Ojigbo, in a statement, said: "We are appalled by reports that Reverend Lawan Andimi, the chairman of a local chapter of CAN, was killed by Boko Haram yesterday.

"With this horrific murder and an increasing number of attacks in recent weeks, Boko Haram has again shown its brazen disregard for the sanctity of life. These deplorable crimes must not go unpunished.

"It is appalling that Boko Haram followed up the killing of Andimi on Monday with an attack on his village in Chibok Local Government Area of Borno State."

Amnesty warned the terrorists that targeting civilians is a crime under international law.

"Boko Haram must immediately stop its attacks on civilians. All those responsible for war crimes and other human rights violations and abuses in Nigeria must be brought to justice in a fair trial."

The international agency called on the Nigerian authorities to re-double their efforts to rescue the hundreds of civilians still detained by Boko Haram.

Also, the Chief Executive of Christians Solidarity Worldwide, Mervyn Thomas, condemned Andimi's murder, urging the government of the United Kingdom to raise the issue of alarming deterioration in the security of Nigeria with Buhari, impressing upon him the urgent need for a comprehensive and effective solution, and offering assistance if necessary.

"The CSW condemns the brutal murder of Reverend Andimi in the strongest terms, and we extend our deepest condolences to his family, friends, and denomination.

"As Christians, knowing there is life after death, we nevertheless value the gift of this life, and we join in mourning an uncommonly courageous man, who despite knowing death was a very real prospect, maintained a calm and deep faith that will continue to inspire for generations.

"The resurgence of both factions of Boko Haram is emblematic of the increasing insecurity in the country, and Nigerian civilians are bearing the brunt of it. In view of the multiplicity of armed non-state actors currently operating in Nigeria, CSW reiterates that rising levels of insecurity throughout the country constitute a threat to sustainable investment and development."

Also, Governor Ahmadu Fintiri condemned the execution of Andimi.

The Director-General, Media and Communications, Solomon Kumangar, said: “the governor is saddened by the gruesome execution of the pastor.”

A journalist, Ahmed Sakilda, was the first to break the news of the cleric’s death on Twitter. “To break some news items can traumatise. I’m battling with one of such. Reverend Andimi, abducted by Boko Haram was executed yesterday. Rev. Andimi was a church leader, a father to his children and the community he served. My condolences go to his family.”

Andimi, who was declared missing on January 2, 2020, had in a video published on January 5, confirmed that he was in the custody of Boko Haram.

He had pleaded with the Adamawa State Government and the CAN leadership to come to his rescue, adding that his captors did not maltreat him, as they were taking good care of him.

The cleric, who spoke in Hausa and English intermittently, urged his family not to be afraid, adding that he would return home safely if it was the will of God.

He said: “I have never been discouraged because everything is in the hands of God. God who made them to take care of me and leave me alive will touch them. So, I am appealing to fellow reverends particularly my President, Rev. Joel Billy, who is a strong man of love that he will do his best to speak with our governor and other necessary agents for my release.

“These people (Boko Haram) have been doing well to me. They have been feeding me with what I want to eat and they provided me with a nice place to sleep, a blanket and everything. So, they have not done anything wrong to me and I believe that God, who made them act in such a way, is still alive.

“By the grace of God, I will be together with my wife, children, and colleagues and if the opportunity has not been granted, then maybe it is the will of God. All well-wishers and colleagues should be patient. Don’t cry, don’t worry but thank God for everything.”

The national CAN expressed sadness over the murder of Andimi.

In a statement, yesterday in Abuja, the Director, Legal and Public Affairs of CAN, Evangelist Kwamkur Samuel Vondip, said the church viewed the unabated kidnappings, extortions and killings of Christians and other innocent Nigerians as shameful to the government that each time boasts that it has conquered insurgency.

He questioned why the Buhari-led government has not overhauled the security architecture with a view to injecting new ideas into the security system since the agencies are not living up to the expectations of the government.

Vondip observed that the church is almost losing hope in the government’s ability to protect Nigerians, especially Christians who have become endangered species on its watch. He called on the international community, particularly the United States, U.K., Germany, and Israel, to come to the aid of Nigeria, especially, the church so that they might not be eliminated one by one.

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N10m bail in alleged
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“It is reprehensible and saddening that each time the government comes out to claim the defeat of the insurgency, more killings of our people are committed. In the light of the current developments and the circumstantial facts surrounding the prevailing upsurge of attacks against the church, it will be difficult for us to believe that the Federal Government is not colluding with the insurgents to exterminate Christians in Nigeria, bearing in mind the very questionable leadership of the security sector that has been skewed towards a religion and region! Is that lopsidedness not a cover-up for the operation of the insurgency? If not, why couldn't the well-equipped security agents of Nigeria get this man killed rescued?”

He recalled that the murdered Andimi, while in captivity, made a passionate appeal to the leadership of his church and the Federal Government to come to his rescue, adding that his church did everything within her reach to secure his safe release but to no avail because they didn't have the military power to do so.

“There are questions begging for answers. What is the essence of SIM card registration if the authorities cannot use it to track down these killers who rely on phones as a mean of communication to do their criminalities? What has become of intelligence gathering of our security agencies? Are the government and the security agencies still claiming that the war against these criminals in religious garments has been won despite all the killings? Is the government sincere in fighting these terrorists or merely paying lip service to the war against the insurgency? Can the government tell us what they did since Rev. Andimi cried out to them for help? If the security agencies claim the terrorists are operating outside the country, why is it possible for these hoodlums to invade the country, kill, maim, burn and kidnap without any convincing checks on the part of the security agencies?”

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