

Police vow to track down Otukpo bank robbers

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Nigerian Police

- **Put commands and formations on red alert**
- **Gov alia sympathises with victims' families**
- **HURIWA seeks police reform, gun rights**

The Nigeria Police, yesterday, vowed to track down perpetrators of the bank robbery in Otukpo, Benue State, where many people, including a staff of United Bank for Africa Plc (UBA), who resumed work a week ago after his National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) programme, were killed.

The Otukpo robbery has elicited anger among Nigerians due to the lives lost and the fact that security operatives could not withstand the firepower of the hoodlums.

Some persons have also blamed the management of the affected banks for lack of vigilance and poor presence of armed security within their premises during the operation.

The robbers reportedly carted away cash and caused pandemonium in the city in the course of the raid.

According to eyewitnesses, the armed men stormed different banks in the area, shooting sporadically while carrying out their devilish act.

Some pictures and video shared online showed some of the banks robbed.

Eyewitnesses claimed that the robbers carried out their attacks unhindered for several hours.

It was gathered that one of the persons killed during the robbery, Emmanuel Uche, reportedly concluded his NYSC programme earlier this year and got a job at UBA where he resumed a week ago.

“We started hearing gunshots about 3.00pm; when I tried to verify I discovered that three banks were being robbed.

“Before they went to the banks, the armed robbers first attacked the Otukpo Police Station, disarmed the officers and were shooting indiscriminately.

“All of them covered their faces and were in two Hilux vans, a Toyota Matrix and another small car carrying out the robbery, which lasted about one hour without any resistance,” the source said.

The source also said that the robbers left seven persons dead, including police officers and a former councillor who was transacting business in one of the affected banks.

“The incident caused a huge stir in the town as residents, particularly traders, were seen running helter-skelter for dear lives,” the source added.

Condemning the attack, the Inspector-General of Police, IGP Kayode Adeolu Egbetokun, noted that the act of violence was an assault on the principles of peace, security and justice that the Nigeria Police Force (NPF) and other security agencies work tirelessly to uphold.

A statement by the spokesman of the NPF, ACP Muyiwa Adejobi, added: “The IGP extends his heartfelt condolences to the families and loved ones of the victims who were affected by this senseless act of violence. He noted that two of the suspects were gunned down by operatives while attempting to escape, adding that the assailants who orchestrated this brazen act of criminality have indeed “murdered sleep” as their actions have shaken the Otukpo community to its core, assuring the public that every resource and effort would be dedicated to ensuring that these individuals are swiftly apprehended and brought to justice.

“In response to this grave incident, the Nigeria Police Force has initiated a comprehensive and coordinated effort to bring the perpetrators of this heinous crime to justice. The IGP has ordered the deployment of additional operational and investigative assets and resources to Otukpo, the Benue State Command, and surrounding states to assist in the swift apprehension of the other fleeing criminals responsible for this atrocity, as a follow up to the gunning down of two of the armed robbers after a hot chase on Friday.

“In the same vein, going by this incident, the IGP has put all Commands and Formations on red alert to avert any further deadly attacks on our institutions and innocent citizens of Nigeria more so that the Otukpo attack was an early warning sign of the Ember Month challenges which is often characterised by bank robbery and other related crimes”.

“We therefore call upon the public to remain calm and cooperate with the authorities by providing any information that may aid in the investigation and pursuit of the suspects. Your assistance is invaluable in our mission to restore safety and security in the affected area and across the length and breadth of Nigeria.

“In the wake of this tragedy, the IGP reiterates the NPF’s commitment to the safety and security of the Nigerian people, standing united against acts of violence and criminality and vowing to work tirelessly to ensure that those responsible for this reprehensible act are brought to justice.”

Governor Hyacinth Alia had also assured that perpetrators of the coordinated bank robbery in the town would be arrested.

In a statement last Friday signed by his Chief Press Secretary (CPS), Sir Tersoo Kula, the governor described the incident as “affront on the state, especially that it took place at the exact time the Security Council Meeting was in progress in Government House, Makurdi.”

He also strongly condemned the dastardly operations and assured that the perpetrators would be brought to book.

He specifically sympathised with the families of those gruesomely murdered by the robbers during the operation and prayed God to grant them eternal rest.

“It is an unfortunate development that people who were on duty, especially police officers, were shot and killed in cold blood by those mindless robbers.

“But they cannot get away with this. Already, security agencies are on their trail and must apprehend and bring them to justice,” he said.

He called on the people of the state to be vigilant and always endeavour to report suspicious movements around them at all times.

Reacting to the incident, National Coordinator of the Human Rights Writers Association of Nigeria (HURIWA), Comrade Emmanuel Onwubiko, strongly denounced the policing incompetence that gave way for the successful and brazen robbery attack.

Onwubiko also called for the urgent reform of the police to enhance security and protect lives and property in the country.

In a statement yesterday, HURIWA said the government should permit citizens of good standing to own modern guns to counter terrorists and armed robbers, as a way to prevent mass killings and defend their right to life.

The statement read in part: “HURIWA is shocked and saddened by the horrific incident that occurred in Otukpo yesterday, where daredevil armed robbers stormed four commercial banks and unleashed terror on innocent customers and passers-by. According to eyewitnesses, the robbers killed about 10 people and injured many others, while the police and the military failed to respond or intervene in the over two-hour-long operation.

“This is a clear indication of the failure of intelligence and the lack of professionalism and competence of the security agencies in Nigeria. HURIWA condemns this act of criminality and barbarism in the strongest terms and demands that the perpetrators be brought to justice without delay.

“HURIWA also expresses its sympathy and solidarity with the families of the victims and the people of Otukpo, who have been traumatised by this tragic event. We call on the government to provide adequate compensation and support for the bereaved and the injured, as well as ensure that security is restored and maintained in the area.

“HURIWA further urges the government to take decisive steps to reform the police and establish state police, as a way to improve security and accountability in Nigeria. The current centralised police system has proven to be ineffective, inefficient, corrupt and unresponsive to the needs and aspirations of the people. State police will enable each state to have its own security apparatus that will be more familiar with the local terrain, culture and challenges, and will be more accountable to the people.

“HURIWA also calls on the government to respect and uphold the right to life of every Nigerian, which is sacrosanct and must be defended by all means. The government should recognise that once life is taken, there is no remedy or redress. Therefore, the government should permit citizens of good standing to own modern guns to counter terrorists and armed robbers, who have been terrorising Nigerians with impunity. The right to self-defence is a natural and fundamental right that cannot be denied or infringed by any authority.”