

## **Chaos In Abuja As Task Force Allegedly Kills Motorist**

Meanwhile, pandemonium broke out at the popular Wuse Market in Abuja in the early hours of Wednesday as taxi drivers blocked all the major access roads leading to the market to protest the alleged killing of their colleague by the Abuja Metropolitan Joint Task Force.

The confusion allegedly started when the task force swooped upon the drivers at Berger and Wuse bus stops to arrest drivers who had parked at the bus stops to pick passengers.

According to an eye-witness, the driver, who was reportedly killed, had refused to surrender his car key to an armed security operative, a member of the team, and when an argument ensued, the security officer allegedly hit the driver with the butt of his gun.

The driver was said to have collapsed and died.

The eye-witness said when the team saw that the driver was dead, they moved the dead body into their truck to drive away, and this infuriated the drivers.

They rose in reaction on seeing the corpse of the late driver being taken away.

The protest by the drivers later spread to other parts of the FCT until about 1:00 p.m.

The protesters blocked vehicles and harassed motorists driving around the Wuse Market, the largest in the federal capital.

The protest spread to Berger, a major transit point in Abuja, and rendered thousands of motorists and commuters stranded.

Armed police officers later occupied the market to halt the violence.

The security officials were also seen clearing the barricades put on the roads by the protesters.

Amid the confusion, traders ran for cover as security operatives shot sporadically into the air.

The security operatives comprised men of the Nigeria police, Nigerian Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC), and the Nigerian army.

Commercial activities in the market were completely paralysed.

The drivers said they would continue the protest until government addressed the harassment of the task force that had become unbearable to them.

Members of the task force were said to have turned the drivers to their cash cows.

One of the drivers who spoke to INDEPENDENT, Chukwudi Okonkwo, said the government should come out clearly on the issue of bus stops in Abuja because when taxi drivers stop at designated bus stops, the Joint Task Force men, who go about with thugs, would harass and extort money from them.

He added that the Joint Task Force operatives collect between N10, 000 and N20, 000 from taxi drivers without giving them a receipt.

He added that once a car was impounded by the Joint Task Force, the owner would pay the un-receipted fees before being let off the hook.

The protesting drivers, who said they were fed up with the harassment of the task force, also stated that they would continue with their protest until the Joint Task Force was scrapped.

They described the task force as a robbery gang targeting motorists.

Okonkwo said: “What is happening here is the same thing that has been happening for a very long time.

“It is a Joint Task Force comprising the army, navy, police, civil defence and the prison warders, and headed by vehicle inspection officers (VIO).

“They always move about with their trucks and even with Black Maria, and when they come to the bus stop and, sometimes on the road, they will come with thugs who usually pretend to be passengers.

“Once you stop for them, they will arrest you. When they enter your motor, they will take you to their office at Wuye, where Shehu is the gang leader.

“Once they collect your papers, you will be charged between N10, 000 and N25, 000, which you must pay without a receipt and nobody questions them.

“I repeat, no receipt is given to anybody. I, as a person, have been arrested for more than seven times.

“Today’s trouble started when the task force people came to Wuse Market bus stop and started harassing people at the bus stop, and that was when the drivers resisted them because it was becoming too much.

“We have been planning to protest this harassment because they were beginning to treat us as people who don’t know their rights.

“How will they come to a designated bus stop and start arresting taxi drivers?”

Another driver, Mustapha Dahiru, said one driver who refused to surrender himself to them at Berger junction was killed when one of the armed security operatives hit his head with the butt of his gun.

According to him, “Those who are saying that nobody was killed don’t know exactly what happened.

“Drivers started blocking the roads and burning tyres when one of the security officers attached to the task force hit a driver on the head with his gun and the driver fell down.

“When they discovered that he had died, the task force carried his dead body and put it into their truck and wanted to drive away, it was then that the drivers started protesting.”

Kayode Opeifa, Secretary of Transport Secretariat of the Federal Capital Territory (FCTA), denied that anybody died.

He said one of the drivers who resisted arrest by the Joint Task Force was injured and had been handed over to the police.

“From the information available to me, there was no death recorded,” he said.

Also, the Public Relations Officer of Department of Road Traffic Services (DRTS), Kalu Emetu, claimed that no death was recorded during the encounter.

He, however, said he was going to release an official statement when he gets details from the field operatives.

According to him, “The task force has a Public Relations Unit, and I think they are in a better position to react to this.

“The information I have at the moment is sketchy, ‘I’m going to issue a statement.’”