

How Inmates Disarmed, Shot SSS Operatives



Scenes from the DSS Headquarters in Abuja, yesterday. PHOTOS BY SAHARA REPORTERS

BAYO OLADEJI, EJIKE EJIKE,
GEORGE AGBA, WINIFRED OGBEBO,
Abuja with agency report

There was panic around the presidential villa and the headquarters of the Department of State Services in the nation's capital yesterday as gunmen suspected to be members of the Boko Haram sect invaded the area in an attempt to free some of their members in the custody of the State Security Service.

It was alleged that one of the suspects had attacked an operative of the Service, disarming him by hitting him at the back of his head with his handcuff. Another operative was injured severely by the sect members.

At the end of the attack, 21 sect members lay dead: 18 died on the spot while three others died from severe gun injuries received during the attack. Also, two SSS men were seriously injured and are receiving treatment at an undisclosed location.

An eyewitness who spoke to LEADERSHIP on the condition of anonymity when our reporter visited the area explained that what happened looked like a military coup and "all the neighbourhoods were thrown into confusion due to the heavy gunshots". He said the SSS was practically overpowered as some of the sect members were seen running outside the area.

"It was the military men that were seen around, chasing and arresting some of the fleeing sect members and I cannot say how many people were killed, but there were definitely casualties," he said.

An SSS source told Sahara-Reporters that the militants succeeded in freeing several inmates and were almost taking over the complex before reinforcement came from the Nigerian military. He said the detainees had held the detention facility under a siege for several hours, with security agents negotiating with them to end

the tense stand-off. He added that the operatives, aided by soldiers, went on the offensive after the detainees who had obtained weapons had run out of ammunition. He said most of the dead detainees were shot as they fled the complex. According to the source, four fleeing suspects were shot dead at a park near the facility.

The source said he could not state if any suspect succeeded in escaping. He would also not comment on the number of casualties on the side of the security operatives.

Reacting to the attack, the deputy director, public relations department of the State Services, Ms Marilyn Ogar, described the attack as "attempted jail break", in a statement sent to LEADERSHIP. She explained that "the Service suspect handler went to the detention facility within the headquarters to feed the suspects. One of the suspects attempted to disarm him by hitting him at the back of his head with his handcuff. His attempt to escape drew the attention of other guards at the facility who fired some shots to warn and deter others".

She also confirmed that "it has been established that 18 casualties were recorded, while two Service personnel sustained serious injuries".

"Three other detainees who sustained gunshot injuries during the incident have also died, while investigation is ongoing to ascertain the immediate and remote causes of the attempted jail break," Ogar said, explaining that "the gunshots attracted the attention of the military with whom the Service has an understanding of mutual assistance in the event of any threat".

"The Army immediately deployed a team to reinforce our perimeter guards to forestall any external collaborators. The situation has since been brought under control."

Later in the day, the roads

leading to the SSS office, which had been cordoned off to prevent possible further attack, were opened and normalcy returned to the area. The roads have been opened for free movement of persons and vehicles.

Security beefed up in Abuja

Security was beefed up yesterday at Transcorp Hilton Hotel, Abuja, venue of the ongoing 7th meeting of African finance ministers and other strategic locations in the FCT.

The development followed an attempted jail break at the headquarters of the Department of State Services (DSS) in Abuja.

A correspondent of the News Agency of Nigeria covering the African ministers' meeting observed that additional security personnel had been deployed to the hotel.

The additional armed men, seen within the vicinity of the hotel, include soldiers, police and officers of the Nigerian Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC).

The armed men were supported by sniffer dogs as they took positions within and outside the hotel.

Security was also beefed up in and around military and other security offices in Abuja yesterday following the attempted jail break.

On the Shehu Shagari Road, where the Force Headquarters is located, the area had been barricaded with armoured personnel carrier; same for the Ministry of Defence, Area 10, Garki.

National Hospital waiting to receive corpses

Meanwhile, LEADERSHIP confirmed from undisclosed sources at the National Hospital, Abuja, that the hospital had received a call from the SSS headquarters that they were bringing some corpses down

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