

Families Excited Over Students' Freedom, End Struggle To Raise Ransom

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There is palpable relief and excitement among family, friends and university authorities following the rescue of the 20 medical students from their kidnappers in Benue State.

LEADERSHIP Sunday learnt that the freed students are currently at the trauma centre of the National Hospital in Abuja receiving treatment.

A police source and the President of the Benue Medical Students Association, Ayator Ngufan, confirmed the report.

The successful rescue operation, which unfolded on Friday night, was coordinated by the Office of the National Security Adviser (ONSA) and featured collaborative efforts from various security agencies, including the police, the Department of State Services (DSS), and military personnel, with additional support from the Benue State government.

The police source further disclosed that the security operatives killed one and captured two of the kidnappers.

He said security personnel who participated in the rescue operations were mandated to move the rescued students to a hospital in Abuja, where they would be properly cared for.

Earlier on Saturday, there were reports that the medical students were rescued at Ajide forest in Ukwonyo council ward, Ado local government area of Benue State, a forest located between Ado and Okpokwu LGAs of Benue State.

The security source said, "We have been combing the areas that are a haven for kidnappers, and for the past week, we have been stationed in this axis. The surveillance helicopters brought by the IGP were also stationed in Utonkon in Ado LGA.

Ukwonyo Village Now Kidnappers Den- Monarch

In a telephone interview regarding the recent rescue of the 20 kidnapped medical students from UNIJOS and UNIMAID, head of Ukwonyo ward in Ado LGA, Chief George Isah, stressed the urgent need for the federal government to establish a mobile police base in Ukwonyo Village.



He described the area as a vast forest where kidnappers have taken control, displaced many local farmers and perpetrated various crimes.

Chief Isah urged the government to bolster security presence in the community, asserting that it would significantly help curb the kidnappers' activities. He revealed that kidnappings had become so brazen that criminals were going door to door in the community.

Expressing hope that the recent incident would bring attention to their plight, he stated, "We have been crying for government attention, and perhaps this situation will finally make the world aware of our challenges."

Chief Isah emphasised the need for immediate action.

"If these students were kidnapped in Oturkpo local government area and taken all the way to Ukwonyo Community in Ado LGA - a distance spanning two local government areas - then the federal government should urgently establish a mobile police base in this community to combat criminal elements and curb their activities."

The University of Jos (UNIJOS) expressed relief over rescuing the 20 medical students from UNIJOS and UNIMAID.

UNIJOS deputy registrar for information and publication Abdullahi Abdullahi noted in a phone interview that both university

officials acted quickly upon hearing of the incident by promptly reporting it to security agencies.

"The vice chancellor, Prof. Tanko Ishaya, has been actively collaborating with security agencies to provide any necessary information to aid the rescue efforts," he stated.

Abdullahi added that the university is still in contact with the students' parents, informing them of developments regarding the rescue operations.

"Currently, the rescued students are in Abuja undergoing medical evaluations, and they are accompanied by the vice Chancellor Ishaya. Once these evaluations are completed, the students will be reunited with their families."

Abdullahi further acknowledged the efforts of security agencies, highlighting that the students were rescued without ransom with the operation coordinated by the Office of the National Security Adviser (NSA).

Chairman of the Transition Implementation Committee (TIC) for Bassa local government in Plateau State and father of one of the released students, Okan Adara, Fidelis Adara, was lost for words with joy, saying he had nothing more to add aside from thanking God and all stakeholders involved in the rescue.

On his part, chairman of the UNIJOS Alumni Association in Plateau State, Gad Peter,

commended the security agencies for their successful efforts. He urged all levels of government to take decisive action against kidnapping, just as he called on citizens and community leaders to expose criminals hiding in their areas.

Attempts to reach the president of the UNIJOS Student Union Government (SUG), Comrade Sambo Peter, for comments were unsuccessful as he did not respond to calls.

The Benue State Police Command had confirmed the release of the 20 medical students on Friday night.

The command's police public relations officer, SP Catherine Anene, broke the news via a text message that read, "Kidnapped victims released. Details will be released tomorrow morning, please."

No Ransom Paid - Police

In a swift response to rumours of possible ransom payment, the Nigeria Police Force (NPF) said no ransom was paid for the rescue of the 20 medical students abducted in Benue State and others.

Force PRO, ACP Olumuyiwa Adejobi, in a statement on Saturday said the clarification became necessary due to some tweets and unconfirmed stories that some money was paid for their rescue.

"We confirm the release of our brothers and sisters and some other Nigerians who have been in captivity on Friday August 23, 2024 in a forest

in Benue State without any ransom paid.

"Contrary to some tweets and unconfirmed stories that some money was paid, no kobo was paid to release them. They were actually rescued tactically and professionally. We commend the security agencies, locals, and ONSA for their commitment and resilience," he said.

Prior to the latest development, the abductors of the medical students who were en route to Enugu State last Thursday had rejected N20 million ransom allegedly raised by a Catholic community in Nigeria.

The president of the Community of Tiv Students at the University of Maiduguri, Prince Tihi Maxwell, whose two members were among the abducted students, had disclosed this to LEADERSHIP Sunday in Maiduguri. Now the would no longer to raise the money.

The second vice president of the Nigerian Medical Association (NMA), Dr Ushakuma Anenga, informed our correspondent via telephone that the successful operation to rescue the abducted medical students was coordinated by the Office of the National Security Adviser in collaboration with other security teams deployed by the Inspector General of Police.

Dr. Anenga praised the rescue team, which included Police, DSS, and military personnel, and acknowledged the support from the Benue State government. He expressed his joy upon hearing the news of the students' release immediately after the National Executive Council meeting in Maiduguri.

"We are very happy about their release," he said.

He extended his appreciation to Benue State Governor Hyacinth Alia, all stakeholders, and the security agencies for their swift response, which led to the students' safe return.

Dr. Anenga further emphasized the need for ongoing collaboration among security agencies to protect health workers, who are increasingly targeted in their line of duty.

He also noted that, as of the time of the interview, some of his colleagues in Anambra and Kogi states were languishing in kidnappers' den, and called on the federal, state, and local governments to enhance protection for health workers, particularly those on duty.

President of the Benue Medical Student Association, Ayator Ngufan, also expressed his joy at the news of their members' release.

"On August 23rd, 2024, we were thrilled to learn about the safe return of our mates. We are deeply grateful to the federal, state, and local governments, the NMA, and all other organisations and personnel who played a role in rescuing them."

Ngufan added that the freed students now receive medical attention at the National Hospital in Abuja.

A family member of Pius Sampson, one of the 20 medical students abducted in Benue State en route to Enugu State, expressed gratitude to the government and security agencies for their efforts in securing the students' freedom.

Read full text at www.leadership.ng

NEMA Distributes Food Items To Sokoto, Zamfara Market Fire Victims

The National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) has distributed assorted food items to the victims of the Gusau and Sokoto fire incidents.

This is contained in a statement by the head of NEMA, Sokoto Operations Office, Mr Aliyu Shehu-Kafindangi, issued in Gusau yesterday.

"NEMA has distributed food

items to the victims of Gusau and Sokoto Market fires that occurred earlier this year.

"The food items were the federal government's assistance to the victims to support their livelihood. The distribution exercises were conducted simultaneously in both Zamfara and Sokoto states.

"The two teams of NEMA performed the distribution

exerciseS in Sokoto and Gusau to ensure that the affected victims received relief allocations," Shehu-Kafindangi said.

According to him, he led the distribution exercise in Zamfara on behalf of the Director-General, Mrs Zubaida Umar.

"The Head of Search and Rescue Unit, NEMA, Sokoto Operations Office, Mr Aminu

Ambursa, led the distribution exercise in Sokoto," Shehu-Kafindangi said.

He said that the exercises in both Zamfara and Sokoto States were carried out through partnership with the Zamfara Ministry of Humanitarian & Relief Matters and the Sokoto State Emergency Management Agency, respectively. (NAN