

Eight dead in prison riot

■ Witness: I counted 20 bodies thrown into the van

EIGHT inmates of the Federal Prison, Agodi, Ibadan, the Oyo State capital, were early yesterday shot dead by security agents battling to foil an attempted jail-break hatched by some protesting knife-wielding inmates.

**From Sola Adeyemo,
Ibadan**

Fourteen others were injured in the violent protest against officials who the inmates alleged were responsible for the death of one of them who took ill last weekend.

Comptroller of Prison

CASUALTIES

Dead: Eight
Injured: Four officials
14 inmates

Mrs Maureen Omeili rejected the claim of the inmates, saying the man is alive.

Four officials were wounded; hit by stray bullets. They have been treated, Mrs Omeili said.

Splatters of blood were seen on various parts of the prison yard.

The ground was strewn with cooking utensils and food items. A gaping hole dug on the tall wall of the

prison through which the inmates intended to escape was being manned by Mobile policemen.

There were signs that some of the shot inmates may have been dragged on the ground before being hauled into the vehicle parked outside: blood trailed the sandy grounds.

Up till about 5.00.p.m yesterday, the lively commercial Agodi Gate area of the prison was thrown into panic as passersby and commuters' movements were restricted.

Mr Sola Ogundipe, the Comptroller-General of Prisons, visited the scene

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Eight dead as prisoners go wild in Ibadan

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late in the afternoon. He flew in from Abuja.

The 500-capacity prison, which houses 680 inmates, had 180 more.

The inmates, particularly from the Awaiting Trial Male Ward, were said to have mobilised their counterparts in the E Ward close to the clinic to lead the riot. A source said that one of the Awaiting trial inmates, "Sanponna", a notorious one, led the protest.

Recounting how the melee started around 6.30a.m, Mrs Omeili said: "One of the inmates was sick over the weekend and was taken to hospital. The inmates probably thought he was dead and they started rioting.

Meanwhile, the inmate is alive. He is very much alive now and responding to treatment. They started rioting this morning around 7.00.p.m. We lost eight of the inmates while 14 of them were injured. Four of my staff were injured due to stray bullet wounds but they have all been taken to the UCH for treatment. The dead ones have been evacuated to the mortuary.

"The protesting inmates broke into the store and tailoring workshop to cart away knives and scissors which they used to attack the staff. We are using the knives to cook food for them."

On the damage done to items in the prison, the Comptroller said: "Most of the drugs we use in treating the inmates were destroyed. We have doctors, nurses, psychologists and all other medical people who come to treat them.

They broke into the clinic, laid their hands on all the



•The hole on the prison wall... yesterday

PHOTO: FEMI ILESANMI

drugs and started scattering them. It was probably because of the protest that they brought out all the drugs because, aside from that, I don't see the reason they should bring out the drug being used to treat them and scatter them all over."

On the allegation that the inmates protested poor feeding and inadequate medication, Mrs Omeili said: "It is not poor feeding issue at all. I can even take you to the store and the kitchen, you can see the type of food they eat. They are well fed. You can even imagine they went to the extent of breaking into the store, took out sacks of gari and beans to use as ladder in scaling the wall to get out of the prison. None of them was however allowed to get out," she recounted.

A Tribune reporter, Tope Abiola was beaten up by prison officials, who alleged that he was spreading false information regarding the number of inmates killed. The officials allowed only the NTA crew to enter the prison with Police Commissioner Udom Ekpoudom when he came to assess the situation. Other reporters had been stoutly prevented from entering until the spokesman (Mr Shadrack Ogundahunsi)

came to usher some of them in.

While conducting the reporters round the yard at about 1.25 p.m., Mr Lanrele Jacob (Deputy Comptroller-in-charge) said that the inmates in E Ward were to be counted early in the morning around 6a.m. as was the routine to ascertain whether those locked in the previous night were still intact. The inmates in the other Awaiting Trial Ward sprang a surprise: they just attempted to overpower the staff at the E Ward. "They broke the television circuit cable through which we monitor them from our office. The circuit was just recently installed. All security gadgets have been destroyed. You can see the broken windows of our offices. They threw stones at them. They broke into the store and brought out over 20 knives and a pair of scissors to attack our staff. You can see sacks of raw food items including beans, gari that they brought out from the store which they piled on one another to be used as ladder to scale the wall. The equipment in the clinic, including telescopes, were destroyed by them."

Assorted drugs, including Procold, injections, Skineal ointment and bottles of Dettol were seen scattered at the entrance of the E Ward where the insurgency started. Residents of the area said contrary to the eight

casualties that the Prison authorities said were recorded, there were many.

One said, pleading not to be named: "With my naked eyes, I counted up to about 20 persons being carried out and thrown into that big waiting van. That is why the officials did not want to allow journalists to enter, so that they would not see the astounding number of inmates already killed."

Another, who said he heard sporadic shooting from the Prison however said he saw a big lorry being driven out. "Many dead persons were in it. They can't be less than about 50 because they were just being thrown into it and loaded

away.

The Commissioner of Police who visited the scene said that the situation was promptly brought under control by the Prison staff who called me and we drafted my men to the scene immediately.

Commenting on the on-the-spot-assessment he carried out with some of his men, Prince Ekpoudom told journalists: "I don't want people to speculate. This type of thing is not the best. Thank God the Prison authority called on us on time and we responded swiftly. The inmates destroyed things, injured prison staff. They drilled holes with the aim of escaping, but none of them escaped."

On the allegation by some people that the revolt came as a result of congestion which was blamed on the police, Ekpoudom said: "People blaming the police for prison congestion are ignorant. The role of the police is to arrest suspects and charge them to court. We are not the courts to convict criminals.

"There was an attempted jailbreak and we stopped it. You can still smell the teargas. If they had escaped, the Prison authorities and the Police would have been in trouble."

On the likely cause of the attempted jail-break, the police boss said investigation was still going on, but he confirmed what the state Comptroller had earlier told journalists.

Speaker's house looted,

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moved."

He however did not say when the items were stolen.

Mr. Ojih reasoned that the Federal Capital Development Authority (FCDA) may have moved the property away, since they belonged to them.

The committee members were also shocked that the contractor handling the renovation still continued work yesterday despite a directive on Monday that work should stop.

But Ojih explained that he was yet to see the con-

tractor after the directive was given at about 6pm on Monday and when members of the committee visited the site.

The chairman of the ad-hoc committee directed that the deputy director should immediately write to the contractor informing him about the directive of the committee and that a copy of the letter should be pasted on the wall of the building.

The committee visited the official residence of the Deputy Speaker, which is also being renovated.

There were no doors, win-

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