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Home » Niger Delta » Kokori's Kelvin seeks life outside detention



Kokori's Kelvin seeks life outside detention

Posted by: Shola O'Neil in Niger Delta 13 hours ago

Kelvin Oniarah is not finding life in incarceration funny. Gone are the good things of life. Gone is his freedom. Gone is his reign. In short, the music has stopped and the dance steps have assumed a macabre mien. He hungers for life outside the detention walls.

Oniarah and his compatriot, Frank Azuekor, who were arrested on September 25 for their involvement in nefarious activities, are asking the Federal High Court, sitting in Abuja to order their release.

In a suit filed by their lawyer, Samuel Omohwo Esharefasa of Festus Keyamo Chambers, they also plead with the court to declare their arrest and subsequent detention illegal.

The respondents in the suit are the State Security Service (SSS), SSS Director-General and the Attorney General of the Federation (AGF).

In an originating motion dated October 17, last year said the government breached their fundamental rights.

In an affidavit deposed to by a relative of Kelvin, Duke Oniarah Ibruvwe, he said contrary to the claims of the respondents, the applicants were neither kidnappers nor armed robbers. He said they were law-abiding and responsible citizens from **Kokori in Ethiopie East Local Government Area of Delta State**, who were championing the cause of their community which has been neglected by Shell Petroleum Development Company and other multinational oil companies, which operate oil wells and flow stations in the community.

He added that Oniarah and Azuekor, belong to the Liberation Movement of the Urhobo People (LIMUP), formed to emancipate the Urhoboland from marginalisation and poverty.

He alleged that they were framed up and arrested in Port Harcourt, the Rivers State capital, where they had gone to honour an invitation by the Delta State government.

The court is expected to look at the matter later this year.

While Kelvin is hoping to get the court to set him free, the State Security Services (SSS) is also perfecting plot to ensure he goes down permanently. In November, it withdrew the charge it filed at an Abuja Chief Magistrates' Court, Wuse, against the kidnap kingpin, and two of his gang members.

They were arraigned for alleged highly coordinated kidnapping activities in the Southsouth and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT).

At the hearing of the matter, counsel to the Federal Government, Cliff Osagie, said further investigation by the SSS had shown that the accused persons were involved in acts of terrorism with elements of kidnapping and murder, which did not fall under the jurisdiction of the Magistrates' Court.

Osagie said the SSS had secured an order of the Federal High Court, Abuja to further detain the suspects for another 90 days pending the conclusion of investigation.

He added that the accused persons would be arraigned before the court as prescribed by law.

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6	7	8	9	10	11	12
13	14	15	16	17	18	19
20	21	22	23	24	25	26
27	28	29	30	31		

« Dec

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Magistrate Usman Ahmed Shuaibu granted Osagie's application to withdraw the charge.

Kelvin and others are to remain in the custody of the SSS until their arraignment at the Federal High Court.

The charges against them are as follows: "That between February 2, 2012 and September 24, 2013 at Kokori, Asaba, Warri, Port Harcourt and Benin City, in Delta, Rivers and Edo states respectively and along Benin-Abuja road, Abuja FCT, you Kelvin Eziegbe (Oniarah), Frank Azuekoh and Haruna Momoh conspired with Rufus Owigho, Ese Oghenerojakor and others now at large to kidnap for ransom the persons of Mike Ozekhome (SAN), Chudi Nwike (Dr), Hope Eghagha (Prof) and many others.

"That you did ambush and attack a Federal Prisons vehicle conveying some members of your criminal gang which resulted in the death of some Police and Prisons officers.

"That you further conspired to unlawfully import prohibited firearms from Libya for the purpose of kidnapping, robbery and related criminal activities and you thereby committed the offence of (1) criminal intimidation punishable under Section 397 penal code, (2) kidnapping punishable under Section 274 penal code, (3) robbery punishable under Section 298 penal code, and (4) criminal conspiracy to commit felony punishable under Section 97 penal code."

Since his criminal escapades propelled him into the top list of Niger Delta most wanted criminal, Kelvin had become a mystery of sort. He is so popularly that he is known simply by his first name. He is not unlike Lawrence Anini, the infamous Nigerian armed robbery kingpin whose fame and notoriety spread through the country in the mid-80s.

Scores of verified and unverified sorties were attributed to him, so much so that he became known as the cat with nine lives.

Kelvin's notoriety as a crime lord was cemented in 2012 when his brazen kidnap operation and deadly high profile armed robbery operation in Warri, Eku, Abraka and other parts of state. He was also fingered as the ring leader of a vast kidnap syndicate which operation spread beyond the state.

He singlehanded placed his Kokori home town, one of the sub-clans that make up Agbon Kingdom in Ethiopia East Local Government Area, on the world map, but for the wrong reason. The town has been tagged the headquarters of kidnapers in the Niger Delta region.

Reliable police sources said eight of every 10 robbery operations in the Osubi-Eku- Agbor axis of the state were either planned in Kokori or executed by gunmen trained by the young man.

The reputation of the Urhobo town was not helped by reports that some prominent chiefs were shielding him and his criminal gangs from the law. He was declared wanted by the Delta State Police Command earlier last year. The Commissioner of Police, Mr. Ikechukwu Aduba, said the efforts of the police to arrest him were thwarted by community leaders in the area.

As bloody as he had been, Kelvin outperformed himself when he led a team to secure the release of his ally and fellow kidnap suspect, who was awaiting trial at the Okere prison in Warri. Rufus, the suspect, and other suspects were being taken by wardens for a court appearance when the accosted them and opened fire on the prison vehicle, killing at least three wardens and two civilians before freeing their man.

Their getaway was as loud as the operation: they shot their way through the heavy traffic from Okere Road, through the NPA Expressway to Effurun Roundabout, where they left trails of blood, bloodied victims, bullet-riddled cars and thousands of panic-stricken residents in their wake.

Reliable sources in the kingdom said the pronouncement of Kelvin carried weight.

Worried by the disgrace his activities had brought to the kingdom, leaders of the area decided to act. In one of their meetings over the sordid state of affairs and the disgrace of being tagged 'Kidnappers Kingdom', they met. Some suggested that the criminal should be rounded up and handed to the law. Days after, at least two of those who backed call for Kelvin's arrest in the meeting were shot dead in broad day light.

The incident led to concern among well-meaning members of the kingdom that there the criminal had infiltrated the ranks and files of the kingdom and justified CP Aduba's claim that members of Kokori and neighbouring communities were shielding the criminal from the law.

The criminals also ambushed and slaughtered at least one soldier and wounded three others attached to a Joint Task Force (JTF) checkpoint in one of the roads leading to the town.

In response, the task force invade and threw a thick cordon of security personnel round the town. The Commander of 3 Battalion of the Nigeria Army, Lt Col Ifeanyi Otu personally led several operations to snare Kelvin

The suffocating presence of security personnel in the town brought a brief respite, which led to Governor Uduaghan presenting the staff of office to James Omeru, a former Chairman of Niger Cat Construction Company, who had been selected as the Ovie of Agbon Kingdom. He adopted the title Ogurimerime Ukori I.

Still the security forces, including JTF, police and State Security Service (SSS), continued an intensive manhunt for the renegade. Sources in the area said Kelvin was confined to a section of the forest in the area, where usually moved in the dead of the night. A newspaper report, which speculated that the wanted criminal had sneaked out of the country to the Republic of Benin, later turned out to be untrue.

The Nation reliably gathered that when security dragnet closed in on him, Kelvin made desperate effort to top official of the state government. "He offered to surrender if the government would be granted him amnesty," our source said.



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It was gathered that Governor Emmanuel Uduaghan, who was approached about the offer turned it down, insisting that Kelvin had committed too many atrocities and killed too many innocent persons to get a soft landing.

It was in the midst of his desperate effort for immunity from his crimes that he allegedly resurfaced in Kokori on Thursday, September 19 to declare his preparedness to fight for the emancipation of the Urhobo people.

He gave the Federal Government 60 day ultimatum to meet his demands in order to avert disaster. The story was that he stormed the community with masked youths armed with dangerous weapons. He was reportedly welcome by hundreds of dancing women and children, who described him as their saviour and a freedom fighter.

Delta, Bayelsa still on U.S. travel alert

No thanks to the activities of men such as Kelvin Oniarah, Delta and Bayelsa states still retain their slot on the United States' travel alert. The most recent of the alert said of both states: "The oil-rich southwestern states of Delta and Bayelsa, on the Gulf of Guinea where piracy is on the rise and militancy by activists demanding a bigger share of oil riches from a government embroiled in numerous corruption scandals."

The alert made reference to kidnappings of foreigners and attacks against police forces in the Niger Delta.

It added: "Criminals or militants have abducted foreign nationals, including U.S. citizens, from offshore and land-based oil facilities, residential compounds, and public roadways."

It adds that international companies and local authorities assert that the number of kidnapping incidents throughout Nigeria is underreported.

And home invasions "remain a serious threat," with armed robbers getting into even heavily guarded compounds.

"Violent crimes occur throughout the country," the advisory says. "U.S. citizen visitors and residents have experienced armed muggings, assaults, burglaries, armed robberies, carjackings, rapes, kidnappings, and extortion."

The advisory says nine foreign nationals, including Americans died last year in kidnappings in southwest Nigeria, three of them killed by their captors during military-led rescue raids.

The advisory posted at the U.S. State Department website and dated January 8 tells citizens to expect little help from law enforcers known for harassing and shaking down foreigners and Nigerians at checkpoints.

It says U.S. missionaries in northern Nigeria have received "night letters" – covertly distributed specific written threats to their safety.

Pointing to possible targets of extremists, it says U.S. citizens should be particularly vigilant around government security facilities; churches, mosques, and other places of worship; locations where large crowds gather such as hotels, clubs, beer parlours, restaurants, markets and shopping malls; and all other areas frequented by expatriates and foreign travelers.

The North has more Muslims than Christians, which continues despite an 8-month-long state of emergency that deployed thousands of troops to three states covering one-sixth of the country.


"Late 2013 saw an increase in Boko Haram attacks and clashes with Nigerian government security forces in northern Nigeria," the travel advisory says. "Boko Haram is known to descend on whole towns, robbing banks and businesses, attacking police and military installations, and setting fire to private homes."

It warns: "U.S. citizens should be aware that extremists could expand their operations beyond northern Nigeria to other areas of the country." Boko Haram already operates in neighboring Chad, from which it kidnapped a French priest who was released earlier this month, and militants from Chad, Niger and Cameroon have been reported fighting alongside Boko Haram in Nigeria, raising fears the rebellion could also spread beyond Nigeria's borders.

The United States advises against all but essential travel to Bayelsa and Delta states, all 13 northern and central-northern states and Plateau State, for years the site of deadly ethnic-religious clashes.

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