

Abducted Lagos school pupils: ‘Security forces kill 14 militants, advance into creeks’

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No fewer than 14 armed militants have been killed in gun battle with special forces deployed to comb the creeks and rescue the six children kidnapped from Lagos State Model College, Igbonla, Epe, Lagos State on Thursday, The Nation learnt yesterday.

Yusuf Farouk, Ramon Isiaka, Pelumi Philips, Peter Jonas, Adebajo George and Judah Agbaosi were abducted from their hostels around 6 am by gunmen in police uniform.

Their abduction followed a three-day unsuccessful attempts by the hoodlums who were stopped by policemen deployed to the school premises.

The gunmen eventually gained access into the school through a hole they made in the rear fence and whisked away their victims.

A source told our correspondent that the abduction of the pupils angered security chiefs in the state, who immediately deployed gunboats and tactical combat forces against the criminals.

The gun battle, which started in the early hours of yesterday, was still on at about 4pm, with friendly forces advancing deeper into the forest for possible location of the pupils.

A resident who hinted on the development told our correspondent that he saw marine policemen, army and navy personnel moving into the area the militants had been displaying might.

He said they heard sporadic gunshots from the lake, adding that friendly forces were advancing deeper into the creeks.

One of the parents whose child was kidnapped said he got information that 14 of the militants had been killed in the operation, adding that several others were injured.

She also said that two soldiers were allegedly hit by the militants' bullets, but she would not know if they died.

The woman, who said the kidnappers were yet to contact any of the parents, appealed to them to release the pupils unhurt.

Her appeal came just as one of the pupils released by the gunmen on Thursday morning, Jibrin (surname withheld) said they were profiled and released because the boat could not contain all of them.

In a telephone chat with *The Nation*, Jibrin said he was released alongside Asari, Tobi and another Jibrin, adding that they were asked to push the boat before leaving.

He said: "They entered our hostel, took 10 of us and moved down to the waterside.

“When they got there, they realised that the speedboat could not contain all of us, so they started asking us questions.

“They asked me what my parents do for a living, and I told them that my parents were late. They asked me to stay aside.

“The others who also told them their parents were farmers, mechanics or petty traders were sent to that side. Then they told us to push their boat and we left.

“I saw garri, gunpowder and bullet inside the boat.”

The Chairman, Operation AWATSE, Rear Admiral Ferguson Bobai and the Lagos State Commissioner of Police, Fatai Owoseni, confirmed that there was an ongoing operation in the area.

They said security personnel were deployed to comb the creeks and rescue the pupils, adding that nothing would be left to chance.

The security chiefs however said they could not make any comment on the killings, stating that they were yet to be briefed by ground forces on the state of affairs.

Bobai said: “I am aware Marine Policemen and our boys (military personnel) are currently in the area. But I cannot confirm if there were killings because operations are ongoing and I haven’t been briefed yet.”

Owoseni said: “Yes, we deployed policemen from the Marine unit and the Inspector General of Police’ (IGP) tactical team to the area.

“Soldiers and naval personnel are also involved in the joint operation.

“Our concern at the moment is to rescue all the students.

“I cannot confirm if there were killings or the number of people involved until I am briefed.

“The operation is ongoing.”

Reacting to the kidnapping, the Deputy Inspector General of Police (DIG) in charge of Operations, Joshak Habila, assured that the pupils would be rescued in few days.

He said: “In the next few days, we would hear good news concerning the students. We have solved all kidnap cases before now because their victims have all been released. So, this will not be an exception.

“We are on top of the situation. Crime is bound to happen, and when it happens, what we should concern ourselves with is how to solve the problem. That is what we are doing.

“We are not joking, and you know that we are very serious when it comes to the issue of crime fighting, especially kidnapping.

“We are working round the clock and synergizing with sister agencies on how to rescue the children and arrest those behind the act.

“As you all know, police cannot be everywhere at the same time. Keeping policemen permanently in a secondary school is not the best, as it would affect the psychology of the students.

“The school is surrounded by water and we have fishermen fishing in the water. They would see strange faces coming with speed boats and they would keep quiet. The villagers would see strange people in their land and they wouldn’t call the police.

“People should embrace community policing and provide adequate information to the Police. That is the only way we can fight the kidnappers to a standstill.

“If you see something, say something.”