

We lost nine officers to Offa robbery

—Police

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Offa, Kwara State remained in shock yesterday, 24 hours after a gang of robbers attacked five banks and a police station in the town, leaving massive blood on their trail.

The Kwara State Police Command confirmed yesterday that nine of its personnel were killed by the robbers.

Seven other people lost their lives in the attacks, spokesman for the command, Mr. Ajayi Okansanmi, told reporters in an update on the mayhem.

Unofficial accounts yesterday said the death toll might have risen to 23, including two policemen allegedly shot by the robbers in Okuku, Osun State while returning from the operation.

Three vehicles were reportedly abandoned by them.

Angry residents called for an immediate review of the security architecture for banks in Kwara State.

Senate President Bukola Saraki, reacting to the incident on his Facebook wall, called it a despicable act committed by cruel individuals.

He said he had spoken with Governor Fatah Ahmed on the development and both of them agreed that no stone would be left unturned until the bandits were found and prosecuted.

One of the casualties was said to be pregnant. Sources gave her name as Omilola Korede.

She reportedly went to one of the banks to lodge a complaint about a transaction.

She had gone to the bank with her young son but both of them were sprayed with bullets.

Three other women identified as Bunmi Mesan, Iya Muji and Mama Big Club, were also killed.

A survivor, who said he hid inside one of the banks during the attack, was still in shock when he shared his ordeal with our reporter yesterday.

He said: “My brother, it is not something to recall or witness. I don’t even pray it for my enemies.

“I saw death staring at me and others. I still can’t talk much about it.”

He pleaded not to be named.

The paramount ruler of the town, the Olofa, Oba Muftau Gbadamosi, was lost for words when he was contacted yesterday.

He said the destruction that came with the robbery was enormous.

A colloquium on the community scheduled for today (Saturday) was shifted to April 14, following the incident.

Offa community leaders spent much of yesterday discussing the robbery incident and resolved to hold a larger meeting of Offa sons and daughters on Sunday, April 29.

Senate President Saraki said: “Make no mistake, there will never be any valid grounds or rationale behind such violence that has left many families without their loved ones – and one more community in grief and shock.

“Last night, I spoke to Governor Ahmed to express my condolence on the lives that were lost in the attack, and we both agree that no stone will be left unturned until the perpetrators of this heinous act are caught and brought to justice.

“It is also important that we all work together to ensure that this does not reoccur. We all must co-operate at various levels to increase the security of our communities.

“I pray that the souls of those that we lost yesterday are granted places amongst the righteous ones.

“My prayers and support will continue to be extended to all the affected families, and we will remain relentless until everyone who planned or carried out this attack faces the full wrath of the law.”

The Emir of Ilorin, Alhaji Ibrahim Sulu-Gambari, condemned the banditry, calling it barbaric, disheartening and ungodly.

He urged clerics across the state to use yesterday’s Jumat service for special prayers for the nation, especially Kwara State.

Asked to assess the situation yesterday, a security expert, Mr. Banjo Famuyiwa, said he could not understand the low presence of police personnel in the town, given its large population and number of banks.

The Chief Executive Officer of PlaySafe Lifecare Foundation said: “The number of policemen available to the community is low, given the population and number of banks.

“The police post is also very close to the road. There are no strong barriers. Once you branch off the road, the next thing is the station.

“In some countries, you allow banks to use their personal security, and I think we should do the same here instead of wasting the lives of our policemen again and again.

“There should be no law forbidding banks from having their own security.”

An Ilorin-based group, Kwara Rebirth Ambassadors demanded an overhaul of the security architecture of the state.

It said: “This latest bloody bank robbery in Offa town has left in its trail several salient questions begging for answers, and it won’t be out of place to demand for a complete overhaul of the security architecture of the state, as the armed bandits have severally proven the porosity and poor policing of our inter-state borders among other noticeable shortcomings.

“A visit to Osun, Ondo, Lagos, Ekiti and other sister states will see the strategic positioning of Armoured Personnel Carrier (APC) in and around the state.

“That is a clear show of readiness to combat security challenges as it arises.

“Armed bandits, violent cultist, touts and thugs have combined to hold the state to ransom in the last 10 days in Ilorin and Offa.”