

Zamfara killing fields



by **Augustine Ehikioya and BLESSING OLAIFA** April 8, 2019 in **Featured, News, News Update**

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*From left: Kyari, Acting IGP Adamu; Rufai and Bichi at the news conference at the Presidential Villa in Abuja...yesterday.02844/7/4/2019/Callistus Ewelike/NAN



The Federal Government has halted gold mining in Zamfara State, 24 hours after the protest by its indigenes living in Abuja. Gold mining is believed to be at the heart of banditry in the state. Augustine Ehikioya and BLESSING OLAIFA report.

Kadaria Ahmed, Editor of defunct Next newspaper, was livid at the weekend. Ms Ahmed and tens of indigenes of Zamfara State stormed the Presidential Villa in Abuja to protest against killings in the state. She accused Governor Abdulaziz Yari of not being concerned about the people of Zamfara.

They called on President Muhammadu Buhari to urgently intervene and stop the killings and kidnappings currently going on in the state. They decried the insecurity in the State which has resulted in apprehension, displacements of communities and loss of lives. Yesterday the Federal Government announced suspension of gold mining in the state. This is believed to be at the core of the banditry in the state.

The convener of the Abuja protest, Miss Fatimah Mustapha said that their action was to call attention of government to the gruesome killings and cases of kidnappings going on in Zamfara.

According to her, perpetrators of these evil acts are getting bolder day by day with little action taken by the authorities to arrest the situation and stop the act.

She alleged that the government of Zamfara was not doing anything to arrest the situation hence the protest in the nation's capital, Abuja, the seat of government.

Mrs Ahmed urged the President to direct security personnel to rise to the situation.

"We have the challenge of security situation all over the country, but that of Zamfara is clearly bad. We are tired of mass burial and that is why we are calling on PMB to intervene.

"Nobody is talking of these killings now among our leaders, and this is apparently disgusting. This issue involves lives and people deserve to be safe where ever they live in this country," she said.

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Mr Zaharuddeen Bello-Imam, a former Director General on Social Media to Gov. Abdullaziz Yari of Zamfara, said the Federal Government should take decisive action against the kidnappers and bandits operating in the state.

According to Bello-Imam, there is need for total overhaul of the security apparatus of the state to control the situation before the killing and kidnapping get out of hand.

Another protester, Mr Aliyu Dansado, said the killings and kidnapping had affected farming activities in the state, adding that he was unable to go to his farms for some time because of fear.

"Government should rise up to action to end the killing and kidnapping, we have been paying ransom to kidnappers for the past five years now, people are killed on daily basis, government needs to do something now," he said.

The protesters marched from the Unity Fountain, Maitama Abuja to the Presidential Villa where they presented their letter for President Muhammadu Buhari.

Speaking to the protesters, Mr Usman Ibrahim, Special Assistant to the President on Security, promised to convey their message to the President.

Also, a coalition of civil society groups blamed Minister of Defence Mansur Dan Ali for his alleged inability to address insecurity in Zamfara.

The coalition made up of the Peoples Alliance for Indigenous Rights (PAIR), Society for Gender Equity (SGE), Network for Onward Nigeria (NeO), and The Peoples Collective (TPC), accused the defence chief of doing little or nothing to stem the killings.

A statement signed by Isa Yaro, National Publicity Officer of the group on Sunday in Abuja, described killings in Zamfara as tragic and unfortunate.

It blamed the Federal Government for failing to arrest the security challenge in the state, for over two years.

It noted that President Muhammadu Buhari ought to have sacked the Minister of Defence for his failures to address insecurity in the country.

"What we find happening in Zamfara state is not only unfortunate but tragic. It is inconceivable that two years on, the Federal Government has failed to address the orgy of killings in Zamfara state.

"All the blame trading and trying to put Gov. Abdulaziz Yari as the main culprit is reprehensible. We all know that governors are merely chief security officers by name without inherent powers.

"For long, the governor of Zamfara state has raised alarm over the buildup of a vicious militia with those responsible at the centre, doing little or nothing about it.

"From our findings, the Zamfara government has spent several millions in kitting, communication gadgets and allowances for the police and military posted to the state.

"What we need to ask is how much leverage has the Minister of Defence, who is from the state, leveraged to address the carnage?"

According to Yaro, it is good that there is a deployment of Special Forces to the state.

He however, appealed to President Buhari to learn from his past appointments in choosing those who will realise his Next Level Agenda come May 29.

IG warns against fake news

The Ag. Inspector-General of Police, Muhammed Adamu yesterday in Abuja, advised members of the public to ignore fake social media reports on Federal Government's decision to suspend mining activities in Zamfara.

The government through the acting IGP announced the suspension of mining activities in the state and threatened to revoke licenses of violators of the order.

The government also ordered all foreigners engaged in mining activities to leave the area within 48 hours as part of measures to check banditry in the state.

Adamu, however, noted that the order issued by the government may attract various fake social media reports, and advised that such reports should be ignored in the interest of peace and stability in the country.

"May I appeal for the cooperation of the local communities especially the traditional and religious leaders within the communities to cooperate with the security agencies.

"Meanwhile, we note the use of social media to spread fake news, falsehood and deliberate misinformation. We therefore urge our citizens to exercise restraint in circulating unconfirmed information capable of doing more damage to us all.

"Let us not allow the social media to hijack our sense of judgment and capture our minds negatively," he said.

He revealed that a joint security task force would soon be constituted to take over the affected mining fields in the state for safe keeping.

The acting Inspector-General of Police, who disclosed the suspension of mining activities when he addressed State House correspondents in Abuja, said the order was part of measures to check banditry in the state.

The IGP addressed the correspondents alongside the Chief of Staff to the President, Mallam Abba Kyari; Director-General of the Department of State Services (DSS), Alhaji Yusuf Bichi and Director-General of the National Intelligence Agency, Amb. Ahmed Rufa'i.

The text he read was titled, "Security situation in Zamfara and neighboring states: Police, military and DSS intensify joint operations against bandits FG suspends all mining activities in Zamfara and its environs."

It reads: "As part of sustained efforts to flush out, and permanently put an end to armed banditry and criminality in Zamfara State in particular and the North West in general, the Nigeria Police Force in collaboration with the Nigerian Military and other Security Services has commenced "Operation PUFF- ADDER" which is a full scale security offensive against the bandits.

“The operation is aimed at reclaiming every public space under the control of the bandits, arrest and bring to book all perpetrators of violence in the area and their collaborators, achieve a total destruction of all criminal camps and hideouts, mop up all illicit weapons fueling the violence and attain a full restoration of law and order in the affected communities.

“Our commitment at protecting the sanctity of life and property is irrevocable, and we will not scale-down the pressure on the armed bandits until they are totally flushed-out.”

He went on: “Meanwhile, in the face of intelligence report that has clearly established a strong and glaring nexus between the activities of armed bandits and illicit miners -with both mutually re-enforcing each other, the Federal Government of Nigeria has directed as follows:

“Mining activities in Zamfara and other affected states are hereby suspended with immediate effect. Consequently, any mining operator who engages in mining activities in the affected locations henceforth will have his licence revoked.

“All foreigners operating in the mining fields should close and leave within 48hours. I want to assure the general public, especially in the affected areas that the security services are doing their best to address the situation.

“May I appeal for the cooperation of the local communities, especially the traditional and religious leaders within the community.”

Air Force

The Nigerian Air Force (NAF) says the Air Task Force (ATF) for Operation DIRAN MIKIYA successfully destroyed a bandits' logistics base at Ajia in Birnin Magaji Local Government Area of Zamfara.

Air Commodore Ibikunle Daramola, NAF Director of Public Relations and Information, disclosed this in a statement issued in Abuja.

He said the ATF also neutralised dozens of the bandits at Ajia and Wonaka in Birnin Magaji Local Government Area of Zamfara.

Daramola explained that the operation was executed sequel to Human Intelligence (HUMINT) reports indicating that the bandits were using a compound within Ajia as a logistics store to support their operations.

“Consequently, the ATF dispatched a Nigerian Air Force (NAF) Alpha Jet, supported by an Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance (ISR) platform, to attack the compound scoring accurate strikes on the target and causing it to erupt into flames, which engulfed the structures and resulted in the neutralisation of some of the bandits,” he said.

The spokesman said few survivors, seen fleeing the vicinity of the target area, were taken out in follow-on attacks while others, who managed to escape the area, were tracked to Wonaka and equally neutralised.

“Independent HUMINT sources subsequently confirmed that more than 25 bandits were neutralised in the attacks on the two locations.

“The NAF, working in close coordination with sister Services and other security agencies, will sustain its operations to neutralise the bandits and deny them freedom of action in the North West,” he said.

Cleric urges Fed Govt to declare state-of-emergency in Zamfara

The Chief Imam of Al-Furqan Mosque in Kano, Dr Bashir Omar, has urged the Federal Government to declare state-of-emergency in Zamfara State to address incessant kidnappings and killing of innocent citizens.

He made the call in his sermon during prayers in the mosque on Friday.

Omar said that the call was necessary in order to check the wanton killings currently going on in the state.

"The wanton killings and kidnappings can only be stopped through the introduction of State-of-Emergency by the Federal Government.

"The people of Zamfara State deserve pity and all forms of compassion to enjoy a peaceful living because the pogrom has consumed many lives with almost no end in sight.

"This is not the first time I am calling on the Federal Government to declare a State-of-Emergency in the state to end the killings," he said.

According to him, the perpetrators of the dastardly acts are made to have a field day in the absence of punitive measures on ground to checkmate such despicable atrocities.

The cleric stressed the need for the government to match its words with action on how to end the disturbing spate of criminal banditry in the state.

He stated that kidnapping innocent citizens on the highways and other secluded areas had become a money-spinning business.

"Only those who lack absolute fear of Allah turned kidnapping as a business hence our decision to call for the imposition of emergency rule to put the abduction kingpins out of business."

Omar explained that no economic development could ever be achieved with the Federal Government paying lip-service to the issue of security in the country.

"The Federal Government should be proactive in finding a lasting solution to the problem," he stated.