

Igangan: Claims, counter claims trail attack

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LEADERS, youths, socio-cultural groups, among other stakeholders in Ibarapa North, have disagreed with the Nigeria Customs Service over the legality claim of its operatives that stormed the community, Friday night.

The attack, which was widely reported as being allegedly carried out by suspected herdsmen, left in its trail the death of the Amotekun Commandant in Ibarapa Central, simply identified as Muri and three other persons.

Many people were said to have suffered varying degrees of injuries in their bid to run for dear life when the alleged operatives stormed the axis at about 8pm.

As the dust settles, community leaders and the youths said they were misinformed on the true identity of those behind the incident, saying it was not an attack but customs officers trying to seize goods.

Reacting to the attack, the Nigeria Customs Service (NCS) spokesperson, Federal Operations Unit Zone A, Theophilus Duniya, in a statement, on Saturday, said contrary to earlier claim that armed herdsmen attacked the community, he said it was smugglers that attacked NCS officials.

On his part, the Convener, Igangan Development Advocates, Mr Oladokun Oladiran, faulted the claims made by the Customs.

He said he had on Friday warned that Nigeria Customs Service would change the narrative, claiming that there were many loopholes in NCS's claims.

Smugglers attacked us—Customs

Customs spokesperson, Duniya, said smugglers attacked after they were sighted by Customs officers in eight trucks conveying contraband items.

According to the Nigeria Customs, three officers and a soldier were injured during the attack carried out on Friday night.

"The injured Customs Officers who are operatives of the Zone A, Federal Operations Unit, sighted eight trucks carrying smuggled foreign parboiled rice whose drivers and armed accompanying passengers launched an attack on the officers."

"One of the attackers was shot and disarmed while the others retreated with their smuggled wares," the statement read in part.

Duniya said the attackers were however repelled by the joint efforts of local vigilante groups.

The Spokesperson said an investigation had been launched to arrest and prosecute the attackers and the attacked customs officers and a soldier, including one that was shot in the head, are receiving treatment.

Acting Controller of the Unit, DC Usman Yahaya, condemned the attack and reiterated the resolve of the service to suppress smuggling.

The Unit, according to the Acting Controller, would never relent or be intimidated by attacks carried out by criminal elements unlawfully bearing arms and unleashing same on officers on legitimate duties.

Operation illegal—Residents

But the leaders of the community have also faulted the legality and sincerity of the operations noting that the manner with which the operation was carried out left more to be desired and suspicious.

From Yinka Adeniran, Ibadan

They described the evening raid on the Igbo Ora and other communities by men of the Nigeria Customs Service (NCS) as unnecessary and not well-thought-out.

The leaders, including the Olu of Igbo Ora, Oba Jimoh Olajide Titiloye, and the Chairman of Ibarapa North Local Government, Mr Adeoye Adedoyin, spoke at a meeting held in Igbo Ora with a fact-finding team of the Oyo State Government, led by the Executive Assistant on Security Matters to Governor Seyi Makinde, CP Sunday Odukoya (rtd).

The leaders said that it was regrettable that the Customs Service troubled the peace of the area when its men stormed Ibarapaland, shooting sporadically.

The Olu of Igbo Ora, who was first to speak, said that the Customs' raid left Igbo Ora and other adjoining towns in disarray following the raid that left three persons, including an Amotekun operative dead.

He said "The raid left so much turmoil in our communities as the Customs men came, shooting sporadically. Many of our people ran helter-skelter."

"We want it stated loud and clear that our communities, Igbo Ora, Igangan and Ayete are not border towns. Why should Customs turn the communities to theatres of bloodshed and war?"

"We want Customs to regulate their operations. It will be better if the authorities restrict them to border towns to end unwarranted attacks on innocent communities," the Olu of Igbo Ora said.

Chairman of Ibarapa North Local Government, Hon. Adedoyin, also told the meeting that the raid left a sour taste in the mouth, as, according to him, peace had returned to the area following the series of security steps taken by the State and Local Government after the last attack on the area by suspected herdsmen.

"We have received the cooperation of state and non-state actors in our efforts aimed at boosting security."

The hunters, Amotekun and other security agencies have been cooperating fully, but we were shocked to hear reports of sporadic gunshots and commotion that ensued after a raid by men of Customs Service.

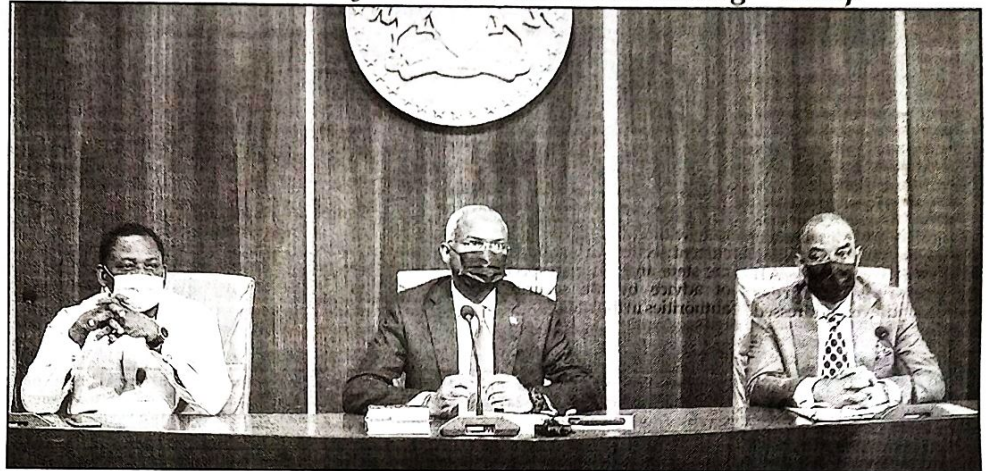
"That raid is regrettable because it threatened the peace of our area," the Council Chairman said.

Oyo govt calls for calm

Odokoya, the Executive Assistant to Governor Makinde, in his address, called for vigilance and calm among the people, adding that the community policing and integrated policing initiative of the administration has been effective.

He said that the police in the area have confirmed the death of one Amotekun operative and two other persons following the said raid. The team, which later visited Igangan, Ayete, Tapa, locations in Igbo Ora, was accompanied by traditional rulers and community leaders from across Ibarapa land.

A source who pleaded anonymity, also said although the



• Minister of Works and Housing, Mr Babatunde Fashola, SAN (middle); Special Adviser, Media and Publicity to the President, Mr. Femi Adesina (left); and Managing Director/CEO, Federal Housing Authority (FHA), Senator Gbenga Ashafaright, during the State House Briefing Series on the theme, "The Buhari Infrastructure Revolution," at the State House Press Room, Abuja on Thursday.

operatives all came in customs and military outfit, there was no known or visible means of identification on either the vehicles brought in for the operation or even the operatives.

He noted that the peoples suspected that they were not real Customs because they were not in their official vehicles.

He added that before the situation got out of hand, the operatives were stopped by the youths and that even though they wore their uniforms the people insisted that they cannot let them into the town as they could not identify themselves.

He said "Concerning yesterday's issue, we were misinformed, we were not attacked, they are Customs officers trying to seize some goods."

"When they entered Igangan, around Ajimati fueling station, some indigenes stopped and queried them. The indigenes insisted they don't want to see any uniform men."

"The people suspected that they were not real customs because they were not in their official vehicles. They wore their uniforms but the people insisted that they cannot let them in."

"This led to arguments which provoked shootings and an innocent soul was killed. This forced them to turn back and force their way out of the community and headed to Tapa."

"Meanwhile, the people of Tapa and Ayete have been informed wrongly that they are

Fulanis even after some people try to identify them to be truly customs."

"On getting to Tapa, residents said they were shouting out very loudly that they were Customs and not Fulani."

"They were stopped in Tapa and were later granted safe passage but on getting to Ayete, they were shooting sporadically in the air which gave the people another wrong signal."

"When they got to the roadblocks in Ayete, one of the Customs officers was said to have been shot from someone hiding nearby, this prompted the other officers to return the shooting to the direction the shot came from and someone was killed in the process."

"After that, they forced their way out of Ayete. They got to Igboora and fire was exchanged again causing another set of killings."

He said further "Firstly, the wrong information that came from Igangan and the Custom officers that came to do unofficial duty were the cause of yesterday's mayhem."

"And in our investigation, we found out that the police of their presence because they were on an illegal duty."

"Also they were not with their official vehicles. The only two hilux vehicles were that of the operation burst and the police who were trying to lead them out of the community after they were invited by the Customs when the whole issue started."

Group faults NCS's claim

While reacting, the Convener, Igangan Development Advocates, Mr Oladokun Oladiran faulted all the claims of the NCS.

He said: "We already saw their narrative coming. I had already said that, that was what they would resort to. But there are many loopholes in their claims, narratives and stories."

"You can see the Customs throwing out a big lie. They should not lie and say how it truly happened. If they had not lied, we would have been thinking that maybe it was our people that made the mistake. But, by lying, it shows that they were trying to cover up something."

"Why would the Customs claim that they had operations in Igboora? Igboora is different from Igangan. And the real truth is that you will pass through Igboora before getting to Igangan."

"Can you imagine, they passed through where they claimed they wanted to arrest smugglers and passed through Idere, Tapa and even Ayete and when they got to Igangan, they started shooting, and you claimed to have carried out operation in Igboora, forgetting that the people know the difference between their boundaries between Igangan and Igboora."

"And when the people of Igangan chased them back, they then shot people at Igboora and because one of the people that died was an Amotekun operative, they had to come up with a

report to cover up their escapades. That was why they centred on Igboora in their report."

"If they were chasing smugglers from Igboora, how come people chased them back from Igangan to Igboora and they didn't shoot until they were returning with heavy gunshots."

"If the narrative had been that, when they went for the operation in Igboora, they chased the suspects to Igangan and people of Igangan started shooting at them and when they were returning, the people of Igboora also shot at them and they had to defend themselves, the story would have sold better, but the customs didn't even mention Igangan at all in their report, no mention of the person they killed in Ayete and so. It's unfortunate."

"Speaking on one of those killed in Igangan, he said, after the Customs fired several shots at him and it couldn't penetrate, one of the officers knelt down and aimed at his scrotum before the man fell."

"Several bullets were wasted. They were just firing on their way from Igangan."

"We know the government would send DSS to someone's house for a raid. There is no problem, let them continue cooking up their stories to justify their misdeeds."

"There is nothing we can do other than tell our people again not to lower their guards or sleep. Now they can put clothes on boko haram and smuggle them into our towns but we will continue to tell our people to be more vigilant and that's all we can do for now."

Eid-El-Kabir: Parks, recreational grounds to remain closed—Minister

From: Gbenga Omokhunu, Abuja

The Minister of the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Malam Muhammad Bello has ordered that all parks and recreational grounds are to remain closed throughout the Eid-El-Kabir celebration.

Bello gave the directive at a meeting of the FCT Emergency Operations Committee (EOC) on COVID-19, chaired by him which was convened on Friday, July 16, to review the current situation of the pandemic in the FCT especially as it relates to the upcoming Sallah celebrations.

A statement issued last night by his Chief Press Secretary, Anthony Ogunleye, the minis-

ter said: "From its deliberations, the meeting noted the increase in the number of COVID-19 cases in the country and the FCT and the possibility of a third wave and sought for ways to curtail its spread."

"Thus, guided by the advice of the health professionals, the following guidelines are hereby issued for the upcoming Eid-El-Kabir celebrations in the FCT;

"All Eid prayers in the FCT are to be held in the open spaces at Jumaat Mosques as well as the National Eid Ground. This is based on medical advice that it

is safer to hold large gatherings in open air spaces than in enclosed structures;

"All open Eid grounds should have multiple entry and exit points with hand washing and temperature checking facilities; "The holding capacity of Eid grounds should be reduced to 50% to ensure physical/social distancing;

"Imams should ensure that sermons are short so that the entire Eid prayers do not exceed one hour;

"All parks and recreational grounds and facilities shall remain closed throughout the festive period.

"Worshippers are enjoined to

adhere to all prescribed non-pharmaceutical preventive measures of facial coverings, constant hand washing and physical distancing'.

Also in attendance at the meeting were the Permanent Secretary, FCTA, Mr Olusade Adesola; the Chief of Staff to the FCT Minister, Malam Bashir Mai-Bornu; the Coordinator, WHO FCT Office, Dr Funera Zakari; the Ag Secretary, FCT Health and Human Services Secretariat, Dr Muhammad Kauri; the Chairman, FCT League of Imams Initiative, Dr Tajudeen M.B Adigun; the Head of Media and Publicity, FCT Enforcement Task Team, Mr Ikharo Attah and other relevant officials of the FCTA.