

NEWS

Shocking finds as security agents raid kidnappers' den in Imo for six hours

• Uzodinma attributes raid's success to answered prayers

MANY residents of communities in Orsu Local Government Area of Imo State and Uli in Anambra State have fled their homes following an offensive launched by a joint security taskforce against bandits in the affected areas on Friday.

Doors and windows were shut while businesses were abandoned as residents took to their heels on sighting the convoy of security vehicles and two armoured cars.

Traditional rulers in the autonomous communities have also gone into hiding while prominent sons and daughters of the areas are giving up the idea of celebrating Christmas at home.

The military operation was in continuation of Monday's clampdown on hoodlums by a joint security team comprising the Army, the Air Force, the Police Force and the Department of State Service (DSS), which succeeded in busting a devious gang that had held the entire area, particularly the people of Nkwere-Uda community in Orsu Ihite-Ukwa village, hostage for a long time unchanged.

The operation was no doubt a tasking mission for the security operatives as the hoodlums had barricaded the roads with fallen palm trees and also dug gullies on them to prevent security agents and vehicles from gaining access to their camps. The military patrol vehicles were held up for more than 30 minutes as the security operatives had to resort to using shovels to cover the gullies and deploying saws to clear the road of fallen palm trees.

Our correspondent, who monitored the six-hour operation



• Security agents at Orsu during the raid

From Chris Njoku, Owerri

tion in the kidnappers' den reports that as soon as the convoy of security agents passed, the criminals would come out from hiding to reopen the gullies while the villagers watched helplessly.

Ironically, the suspected criminals appeared to enjoy the support of many of the inhabitants of the villages.

The villages boast many prominent sons and daughters including a controversial pastor who is usually in the news for weird reasons and whose approach to religion is shrouded in controversy, particularly as they concern deliverance and healing.

The bandits also mounted several checkpoints near the

house of the controversial pastor where they collect tolls from motorists and levies from villagers conducting traditional marriages or building houses, without anyone challenging them.

One of the kidnappers' strategies was to lay landmines at strategic points on the roads as well as the entrance to their camp.

Inside the camp was a flat of about eight rooms with dilapidated roofs, doors and windows.

Among the horrifying sights in it were pits filled with decomposing human bodies, decapitated human heads, charred remains of human beings, dreadful shrines and clear practice of cannibalism.

The topography of Nkwere-Uda in Orsu Ihite-

Ukwa Community of Orsu Local Government Area of Imo State and Umuezeala Uli Community in Anambra State provides conducive environment for criminal activities. The area is surrounded by deep valley and thick bushes that provide easy escape routes for the criminals.

According to a security source, the valley requires an air raid and a permanent military camp to sustain the successes recorded in the raid for sanity to return to the areas.

It was a hectic moment for mortuary attendants trying to evacuate decomposing bodies of abduction victims who were slaughtered and dumped into seven feet deep pit dug at left rear of the camp. There were several other pits covered with earth and believed to have been filled with the remains of the victims.

The security agents came face to face with scores of decomposing and roasted corpses of human beings, some of which appeared to have been partially consumed while the remaining parts were left in the shrines and pits.

About four human skulls were also found in one of the baskets in the bandits' camp, roasted together with decapitated legs.

Our correspondent observed that some of the body parts were roasted and consumed while some parts were

used in cooking soup. "We discovered a pot of egusi (melon) soup full of human meat," said one of the security men.

Two traditional rulers who were kidnapped from their palaces, Eze Paul Ogbu of Ihite Ihube and his counterpart, HRH Eze Acho Ndukwe of Amagu Ihube in Okigwe LGA, were abducted same day by different groups of the gangsters. Eze Ogbu was murdered by the hoodlums while Eze Ndukwe was rescued from the bandits' camp by the security personnel before he could be killed.

The Imo State Government moved in to evacuate more than 10 decomposing bodies, including the corpse of the traditional ruler Eze Paul Ogbu, which was dumped in a pit. Also discovered in the pit was near decomposing body of the youth leader of Ihite Community, Okigwe, Victor Chukwumeka Osueke.

The joint security team accompanied the mortuary attendants from the Federal Medical Centre (FMC) Owerri and Aladinma to evacuate the bodies.

According to one of the mortuary attendants, the monarch and the youth leader appeared to have been clubbed to death while other victims either had their heads chopped off or their bodies dismembered.

One of the monarchs'

younger brothers, who did not want his name mentioned for security reasons, was at the site to identify the late traditional ruler and the youth leader's body. Both were abducted from their homes in Okigwe last week.

He told *The Nation*: "They killed him because they accused him of supporting the Governor Hope Uzodinma second term bid."

Speaking to *The Nation* at the DSS office, the son of the late traditional ruler, Prince Chuku Ogbu, confirmed that the evacuated body was that of his father. "It is the body of my father," he said.

The leader of the security team, Wilcox Idaminabo, said they were at the camp based on intelligence that bandits had turned the place to a haven for kidnapping and all sorts of crimes.

As a result of the raid, the security agents were able to rescue HRH Eze Acho Ndukwe of Amagu Ihube in Okigwe LGA, who was abducted some days back.

"In addition, we recovered vehicles and saw a lot of dead bodies, as their stock in trade was to kidnap, kill, behead some and roast," Idaminabo said.

The team leader said that Governor Uzodinma had asked them "to sustain the momentum, return stability and normalcy in the area to achieve the target of ensuring that the people come home to enjoy Christmas."

Receiving the team on arrival at the DSS office in Owerri, the State capital, Governor Uzodinma thanked God for the successes recorded, insisting that "it is only by the Grace of God who hears the fervent prayers of his people that the success was achieved."

He added that he was vindicated as he had said that the spate of insecurity in the state was contrived, sponsored and masterminded by disgruntled politicians who have sworn to make the state ungovernable for him.

He described the hoodlums as "ordinary criminals who have no future marauding as bandits" and vowed that the law would take its course on them.

The governor further assured that government would take on criminals in the state headlong, describing banditry as a "jungle business."

Expressing gratitude to God and the Security agents for saving his life from kidnappers, Eze Acho Ndukwe described the role played by the security operatives following the directive of the governor as "wonderful show of power unprecedented in his life time."

Top African cardinal in Vatican abruptly offers resignation

MATICAN City—Cardinal Peter Turkson, seen by some as a candidate to become the first African pope in about 1,500 years, has abruptly offered his resignation from a key Vatican department, sources familiar with the matter said yesterday.

Turkson, 73, from Ghana, has been a key adviser to Pope Francis on issues such as climate change and social justice, and is the only African to head a Vatican department.

Vatican sources said the pope has yet to decide whether to accept the resignation.

Development. It was formed in 2016 to merge four offices that dealt with issues such as peace, justice, migration, and charities.

Reports said Turkson, who is about two years shy of the mandatory retirement age of 75 for bishops, had become "fed up" with internal disputes.

Further reports said Turkson had told staff he would say more after the pope made his decision.

His departure would leave the Vatican with no African heading a major department, following the retirement of Cardinal Robert Sarah of Guinea

derwent an external review headed by Cardinal Blase Cupich of Chicago at the pope's request earlier this year.

His offer to resign follows two high-level departures from the department over the summer, one because of retirement and another sudden and unexplained.

The Catholic Church had several popes of North African origin early in its history, the last in the 5th century.

Even if he leaves his Vatican post, until he turns 80 Turkson would still be eligible to enter a conclave of cardinals to elect the next pope after