

# Bloody day in Zamfara as soldiers kill five bandits

**O**PERATIVES of the Joint Task Force, Operation Hadarin-Daji, have rescued six female students of Federal University, Gusau, Zamfara, abducted in the early hours of yesterday.

But their rescue was not without some bloodshed as five of their abductors were killed by soldiers in a shootout.

A security source said yesterday that a joint security operation between the army and the police was underway to free 29 others who were still in captivity.

The students were abducted from their off-campus residence in Sabo Gida village in Bungudu Local Government Area.

Mugira Yusuf, spokesperson for the Zamfara State governor, said 24 students, 10 workers and a security guard were seized by armed men from the university in the early hours of yesterday.

Force Information Officer, Operation Hadarin-Daji, Cpt. Ibrahim Yahaya, confirmed this to the News Agency of Nigeria (NAN) via the telephone in Gusau, the state capital, yesterday.

Yahaya said that the troops pursued the abductors who took the students, mostly females, to the forest.

He said the troops engaged the abductors in a gun duel, supported by the air component of the Nigerian Air Force (NAF), and rescued six of the students.

Yahaya further stated that the rescue effort was still ongoing.

"The troops also recovered one AK-47, a magazine, four motorcycles and one communication gadget from the terrorists," the officer said.

NAN reports that the institution's students had, in June, protested the spate of abductions of their schoolmates residing in Sabon-Gida and Damba communities.

NAN also reports that the two communities are opposite the main campus of the university, which is about 20km from Gusau, the state capital.

Efforts to speak with the school authorities

• *Rescue six abducted Gusau varsity students*

• *Fate of 29 other abductees unknown*

• *Governor summons security heads over abduction*

on the incident yielded no result as the institution's spokesperson, Umar Usman, did not respond to several calls put through to him by a NAN correspondent.

A student of the school, who asked to be anonymous for security reasons, told Channels Television that over 24 schoolmates, mostly ladies, were abducted during the attack.

A resident of Sabon-Gida identified as Nazeer Sabon-Gida confirmed that the gunmen invaded the community around 3 am and started shooting indiscriminately.

According to him, three students' hostels were attacked and all the students in the hostels were taken away by the bandits.

"They entered the town around 3 am and started shooting indiscriminately," he said.

"We have yet to confirm the number of students kidnapped because the bandits entered three hostels and kidnapped all the students there. It is difficult to ascertain their numbers now."

Another source told Channels Television that the bandits were engaged with troops of the Nigerian Army in a fierce gun battle but that did not stop the bandits from escaping with the kidnapped victims.

"They were seriously engaged with the army troops but the way these bandits operate, they will divide themselves into two, one group will move with the kidnapped victims while the other will stay behind to protect the first group," he said.

"The first group had left with the students while the second group engaged the army in a gun duel."

Armed gangs have plagued the northwest in recent years, kidnapping for ransom, looting and destroying communities and murdering civilians.

Security forces' attempts to halt their rampage have met with little success.

Kidnapping of students, once a notorious tactic by Islamist militants to intimidate the population, have become a money-spinning industry for armed gangs demanding ransom payments.

Zamfara State governor, Dauda Lawal, yesterday summoned an emergency security meeting over the abduction of the hapless students.

The spokesperson of the Governor, Sulaiman Bala Idris, said in a statement yesterday that the emergency meeting aimed at ensuring the immediate release of all abducted persons and also finding a lasting solution to the lingering issue of insecurity that has become a source of concern to the administration.

He added that the governor directed the Deputy Governor, Mani Mallam Mummuni, to provide all the necessary support to the security agencies to restore normalcy in all the affected areas.

"During the meeting, the security chiefs assured the Deputy Governor of their commitment to restoring peace in the state. They equally unequivocally confirmed to the Deputy Governor that troops had successfully rescued six kidnap victims."

"The Security Chiefs further assured that troops had neutralised scores of the kidnapers and are actively pursuing them to ensure the safe rescue of all victims."

"Mani Mallam Mummuni urged the heads of the security agencies to improve troops' presence in volatile areas for surveillance."

"The Deputy Governor has reassured the people of Zamfara that security operatives are working tirelessly to address the current situation."