

Police kill 30 kidnap-suspects in Enugu



• Residents urge govt to demolish properties used as hideouts

No fewer than 30 kidnapers, including members of the Biafra Auto Pilot, also known as Unknown Gunmen, a faction of the proscribed Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) loyal to the Finland-based, Simon Ekpa, which terrorised Enugu and its environs, have been gunned down by security operatives, a police detective has said.

In a statement, Governor Peter Mbah's Media Office, said while a joint security operation rescued some kidnap victims in Ugwuogo Nike-Opi Road yesterday, a seven-man gang of kidnapers were killed.

A Police Superintendent, Onochie Ezech, reportedly said: "We were on the trail of these kidnapers for more than three months. They had been operating within this axis where they kidnapped their victims and kept them at a large poultry farm at Ogebeke Nike until ransoms were paid. So, on a tipoff, we swung into action. On sighting us, these men opened fire on my men, and we retaliated and overpowered them."

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Ezech added: "This is a gallant crack squad with the mandate to eliminate every form of threat in the state. We have recorded huge successes over the past months. You know our role is not to rush to the media to tell our story but to ensure that every citizen and resident of the state has peace."

"I can tell you that we have already neutralised over seven criminal gangs who were mostly kidnappers and unknown gunmen. We are going after them. We are taking the battle to their doorsteps because the governor said we should not come back home if we don't rid the state of threats.

"So, we are on it. In fact, during our operations, we identified many criminal hideouts that serve as rogue premises where kidnap victims and dangerous weapons are kept. These include New Artisan Market, and Akwuke community, and some parts of Isi Uzo Local Government. During rescue operations, we were able to neutralise over 30 of the kidnappers and recovered guns and valuables."

Meanwhile, residents have appealed to the governor to invoke the state's Criminal Code and demolish the properties used by kidnappers and other criminal elements as stash houses, saying it would serve as a deterrent to criminals.

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The residents told Mbah to go beyond arresting and hunting down the kidnappers to invoking his power as the chief security officer of the state through the demolition of all the properties harbouring the kidnappers.

According to them, the law empowers the state government to demolish buildings used for kidnap activities, including hotels and private facilities.

A senior lawyer, Chief Ani Iheanacho, who spoke to reporters in Enugu, said the state has a criminal law which was amended in 2016 to accommodate a new section which empowers the governor to pull down structures used for kidnapping.

"We cannot continue like this. Yes, beyond going after the criminals, the governor must show both political and legal courage to go after properties used as hostage holding cells and bring them down irrespective of who the owner or owners are.

"The state must deter these criminals and those enabling their access to such buildings. That is what justice is all about. It's justice to the kidnap victims; justice to the family of the victims, and justice to the society at large," the legal practitioner submitted.

One of the rescued survivors, Dr Kate Pamela, said: "Each time I pass through that poultry, I feel I have been denied justice by still allowing it to operate. They kidnapped us and kept us there for five days. They even killed two of the victims because their families could only afford N10 million each against the N50 million demanded. Notwithstanding that I was able to identify the bodies of three of the kidnappers when they were killed, I still feel that the area should be cleared.

"The government must ensure justice by turning that place to a landfill."