

How we mobilised food, milk, drinks, tramadol to release kidnapped Ekiti school pupils, teachers —Family sources

• Why school bus driver was killed by abductors •Oyebanji visits victims in hospital, says perpetrators will be arrested •Victims undergo trauma treatment

by **Yomi Ayeleso** February 5, 2024 in **Top News** Reading Time: 5 mins read

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From left, Ekiti State governor, Mr Biodun Oyebanji; Chief Medical Director, Ekiti State University Teaching Hospital, Professor Kayode Olabanji, with one of the rescued teachers of the Apostolic Nursery and Primary School, Emure, during the governor's visit to the hospital in Ado-Ekiti, on Sunday. Photo: Ekiti Government House.

ABDUCTORS of pupils and teachers of Apostolic Faith Group of Schools, Emure-Ekiti, Emure Local Government Area of Ekiti State have released the victims.

The gunmen had on Monday ambushed the school bus conveying the pupils and staff to Eporo-Ekiti, a suburb of Emure, at a bad spot and whisked away five pupils and four members of staff, including the driver.

The kidnappers later reached out to the families of the victims and demanded N100 million ransom, but after much pleading, they reduced the amount on Thursday.

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Gunmen intercept school bus, abduct pupils, teachers in Ekiti

Nigerian Tribune gathered from relatives of the victims that the hostages were released in a forest between Owo and Oba-Akoko in Ondo State at about 1:30 a.m. on Sunday after payment.

However, the kidnappers killed the driver of the school bus, identified as Taiwo Olugbaye, in the forest.

One of the parents of the victims who spoke on the condition of anonymity, revealed that members of the community and other indigenes, both home and abroad, contributed the ransom.

He stated that the kidnappers asked the family to bring the ransom, alongside other items such as food, drinks and tramadol to the forest.

The family source disclosed that the driver was killed by the kidnappers after he was said to have reneged in dropping the telephone numbers of his relatives to call for ransom.

According to one of the parents, "We have to thank God for the safe return of our children and wives from the forest after they were kidnapped on Monday.

"The kidnappers insisted on collecting ransom on Saturday and we rallied round the communities, including our people outside the country, to raise the ransom. They even collected a carton of tin milk, black bullet, fried rice with chicken, soft and energy drinks and tramadol from us.

"We were asked to take the money and the items to a bush in Ondo State, a farmstead called Ago Paanu, at about 7:00 p.m. It is between Oba Akoko and Owo. Before they could release our people, they confirmed the money and those items. We walked through the bush till about 1:00 a.m. when we saw the victims."

On why the driver was killed, the source said: "The children told us that when they [kidnappers] were asking for telephone numbers of relatives to call from each of them, the driver told them he didn't know that of his wife and school proprietor offhand; this made them angry and they hit him with their gun.

"For five days, he was said to be having issues after the injury he sustained and was shot dead on Saturday morning. The most painful thing is that his corpse was burnt in the bush, according to what the pupils told us.

"It was a bitter experience for the victims, especially looking at how the driver was killed. We appreciate the efforts of the state government and the security agencies."

Recounting how they retrieved the victims in the bush, a parent who spoke at the premises of the hospital on condition of anonymity said: "The kidnappers were calling persistently that we should hurry up. They said we should meet them at Ikare junction. I wondered how they came to Ikare junction when they took the children at Eporo.

"When we got to Ikare junction, he said we should buy food, so we went to buy rice and meat. When we were about to get to Waterworks, he called that we should turn back, and then the kidnapper described a road that only big vehicles could pass. We decided that all of us should not go there so that they would not think that we came with policemen who could make them injure the abductees.

"When we told them we were on the path, he [kidnapper] said only two persons should come. He threatened to waste the kidnapped persons if more than two persons come. Only two continued while the rest of us sat on the road there. The driver of the vehicle and one person continued far into the forest and drove back. So, they now used a motorbike to trace the kidnappers to drop the money and the food.

"On collecting the money and food, they released the kidnapped persons. They used motorbike to bring the kidnapped persons to the road, it was then they called us to bring the vehicle to convey them."

Nigerian Tribune visited the Ekiti State University Teaching Hospital (EKSUTH) in Ado-Ekiti on Sunday, where the eight victims were receiving treatment in line with the directives of the state governor.

Speaking, the Chief Medical Director (CMD), Professor Kayode Olabanji, said the victims were being given necessary medical attention to ensure their full recovery from the trauma.

Olabanji said: "Very early today [Sunday], they were brought in and they were in various conditions, some of them were so dehydrated, we don't know when last they took water or even food.

"Many of the pupils were in panic state; you could see that they were very terrified. However, immediately we brought them in, they were attended to by doctors, nurses and other specialists. We brought in those clinical psychologists who could work on them to allay their fears.

"They were given the initial resuscitation, including rehydration; they were given fluids; some who needed oxygen were given oxygen.

"After they had stabilised a bit, they were even given food too. They are much better; we will still carry out a few investigations to fully appraise their situation. But I can say with confidence that they are clinically stable and we don't foresee any untoward eventuality."

The police command in the state, through a statement by its spokesman, Abutu Sunday, who confirmed the release of the victims, said they were rescued by a combined team of police and other security agencies, including the Amotekun Corps, local vigilantes and hunters and the support from state and federal governments.

Abutu said: "While we sympathise with the family members of the driver who is suspected to have been killed by the abductors while in hostage, the command vows to continue with the operation and investigation until the perpetrators are arrested and made to face the full wrath of the law.

"Meanwhile, the rescued victims have been handed over to the state government for medical examination and attention."

When asked about the ransom payment, the PPRO said: "We are not aware of it; we heard it as a rumour."

Meanwhile, the state governor, Biodun Oyebanji, who visited the victims at the hospital, commended President Bola Tinubu and the service chiefs for their support in rescuing the victims.

Oyebanji assured the people of the state and family members of the victims that the perpetrators would soon be arrested and brought to book, adding that security agencies are closing in on them.

The governor said he remained committed to the security of lives and property of citizens of the state and would continue to collaborate with relevant security agencies and the traditional institution in the war against criminals.

According to him, "We thank God for their safe return. I am excited and I give glory to God. I also thank President Bola Tinubu for his swift response and for giving specific directives. His intervention made the difference and I am thankful to him on behalf of Ekiti people. I am also thankful to the security chiefs for their support.

"They all put resources together and mobilised men and materials to ensure we rescue the children. All I can say is that we shall go after the criminals and we shall get them."

Expressing his condolence over the death of the bus driver, Oyebanji said the government would not leave any stone unturned in the bid to apprehend the criminals, as well as those involved in the killing of the two traditional rulers.

"It is very sad. My condolences to the family. I have directed the deputy governor to pay a visit to the families and to the Elemure to commiserate with them. But what I can assure Ekiti people is that we will go after the criminals," he said.

