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130 out of 150 inmates arrested after Enugu jail break

Posted To The Web: Thursday, June 04, 2009 - Lawrence Njoku, Enugu



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IN a scene right out of a Hollywood movie, about 150 inmates of the Enugu Maximum Security Prison on Tuesday night escaped after dismantling the roofs of the building.

Sources said the inmates apparently used whatever they could lay their hands on in the building to pull out the nails binding the roofing sheets.

As they escaped from the custody into the premises, they were said to have kicked, slapped and dealt dangerous injuries on prison officials on duty as they made their escape by scaling the over eight feet high perimeter walls surrounding the compound.

The Guardian further gathered that in the confused situation, some of the escapees and inmates had broken into the female section where they allegedly raped some of them.

The inmates were said to have spent over two years awaiting trial for various offences in Enugu Prison, which is located at Okpara Avenue.

However, one of the unlucky inmates who tried to escape had slipped while climbing the wall, fell and in the process, hit his head on a stone. He died before help could come his way.

Three prison officials, who were said to have sustained serious injuries as a result of the beating they received from the fleeing inmates, are lying critical in an undisclosed hospital. The number of inmates also being treated for injuries sustained in the process could not however be ascertained.

The Comptroller-General of Prisons, Mr. Olusola Adigun Ogundipe, who arrived in Enugu yesterday afternoon on receiving the report, confirmed the incident,

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saying however, that the situation had been brought under control.

Ogundipe disclosed that the jail break occurred at about 12 midnight when most officers of the Enugu Prison had closed for work and gone home, stressing however, that of the 150 that escaped, 130 have been recaptured while intensive efforts were being made to capture the remaining 20.

He stated that the jail break was carried out in the section housing the 724 awaiting trial inmates, explaining that the convicted inmates did not participate in the jail break.



The Comptroller-General attributed the incident to what he described as "agitation for freedom among the inmates," stressing that some of them had stayed too long in prison custody without being tried for offences they were accused of.

Explaining, however, that the Enugu State Government was doing its best to decongest the prison and attend to cases of those awaiting trial, he stated that the chief judge of the state had last week held two court sessions in Enugu prison, where he treated some of the cases, stressing that he (the chief judge) would return next week to continue the exercise.

"The figure 724 is rather too high for any prison to have in custody for those awaiting trial alone for a prison built for 683 inmates but currently has 987 inmates. Although this situation has been so because of the processes in court, Enugu has continued to try to reduce the number to a manageable level," he added.

Asked whether it had been established that the action was aided by some prisons officials, Ogundipe said that the issue was being investigated, confirming that he had received reports of rape of female inmates during the incident.

"The report of rape is being investigated but definitely when you have such massive escape, so many things are bound to happen. So, we don't rule this out in any way," he added.

The Comptroller-General, who further blamed the incident on dilapidated and old facilities operational in Enugu prison, said that the facility was built in 1924 by the colonial masters and has remained so since then. He stated that efforts to rehabilitate the structures have not yielded fruitful results.

He commended the State Police Command, the Army, Civil Defence Corps and his staff on duty, saying that their effort saved the state from being infested by the inmates, assuring that sufficient security had been put to forestall further occurrence.

Appealing to the society and residents of the state to help locate the fleeing inmates, Ogundipe further observed that discrimination against prisoners was one of the major problems hindering the work of the prisons.

The Enugu Prison currently has a population of 987 inmates, of which 33 are females while 954 are males.

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