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Boko Haram kills 300, abducts 11 more girls

MAY 7, 2014 BY KAYODE IDOWU AND OLALEKAN ADETAYO WITH AGENCY REPORTS

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Boko Haram leader, Abubakar Shekau

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IN another daring operation, members of the terrorist Islamic sect, Boko Haram, on Monday night killed about 300 people in Gamboru Ngala, Borno State. Gamboru Ngala is a border town with Cameroon.

The Boko Haram insurgents also abducted 11 more girls in Warabe and Wala communities in the Chibok Local Government Area of Borno State late on Monday.

The insurgents reportedly drove into Gamboru Ngala in armoured vehicles.

It was learnt that the insurgents, who seemed to have targeted a local market, shot sporadically at traders at the market before proceeding into the town to wreak more havoc.

Gamboru is situated along Nigeria-Cameroon border and is the administrative headquarters of the Ngala Local Government Area of Borno State. It is about 200 kilometres from Maiduguri, the state capital city.

Senator Ahmed Zannah, who is representing the area in the Senate, confirmed the killings. He said the invaders spent about 12 hours wreaking havoc on defenceless Nigerians.

He revealed that several other persons were injured in the attack, while almost all the houses and shops in the town were burnt down.

The senator, who spoke in a *BBC* Hausa report monitored in Maiduguri on Tuesday, said many people were wounded, while surviving victims rendered homeless as thousands of houses and shops were burnt by the rampaging gunmen.

He claimed that the attackers were armed with dangerous weapons comprising Armoured Personnel Carrier, Improvised Explosive Devices, petrol bombs, assault rifles and Rocket Propelled Launchers.

"The attackers stormed the communities in the night when residents were still sleeping, setting ablaze houses and shooting residents who tried to escape from the fire," he said.

He added, "About 300 persons were confirmed dead after the incident, with several others injured. Almost all the houses in the communities were destroyed by the hoodlums who threw IEDs at the buildings.

"My brother who was at the scene of the attack told me that the actual number of the dead cannot be ascertained but at least they are up to 300. In fact, as he spoke he wept following the high number of the dead bodies which littered the market."

According to him, the security forces earlier deployed in the area, had moved to the Lake Chad axis when they received intelligence report that some gunmen were sighted with abducted schoolgirls moving to the area.

"It was just an hour after their withdrawal that the terrorists invaded the town, shooting everyone at sight and setting buildings on fire. So far 200 vehicles and thousands of houses, shops and an outfit of the Nigerian Customs Service, (NCS) were all burnt", he explained.

A local government official who declined identification also confirmed the casualty figure.

"It is really a terrible situation, we had wanted to rush relief materials to the area to provide temporary succour to the victims. But we were prevailed upon by security agents to shelve our plans for security reasons," the official said.

More girls seized

The 11 girls were reportedly seized in Warabe and Wala when gunmen invaded the communities.

Warabe is about 160 kilometres away from Maiduguri, the state capital.

The community is located on the outskirts of Gwoza town, which had witnessed a series of deadly attacks by suspected terrorists in recent times.

Police sources and residents confirmed the kidnapping of the girls, said to be aged between 12 and 15.

A resident of Warabe, who said he had since relocated to Gwoza, Ishaku Bremcha, said through the phone on Tuesday, "There was a twin ambush by gunmen last night along Guduf-Gava route of Gwoza Hills. The gunmen came through the settlements of Hwa'a, Chikede, and Guduf-Wala hills down to Wala Kasa, and proceeded to Dure village, west of Gwoza

town with 11 abducted teenagers into Sambisa Forest last night.

"The abductors did not inflict injury or kill any of us in Warabe and Wala, but took away 11 of our young daughters into the forest, after warning us not to report the kidnappings."

The Borno State Commissioner of Police, Tanko Lawal, could not be reached for confirmation because GSM lines to Maiduguri were inaccessible.

But a top police officer, who spoke on the condition of anonymity, said some armed hoodlums attacked two villages in the Gwoza council area "and abducted about a dozen teenagers."

A resident of Warabe, Mallam Bello Umar, who spoke to journalists in Maiduguri, said, "A group of terrorists invaded Warabe village on Sunday night, abducted 11 of our teenage girls and carted them away with our foodstuffs and livestock.

"As I am talking to you now, I have run to Gwoza Council headquarters, and even in Gwoza, we cannot move around easily due to the fear of the terrorists.

"The situation is so pathetic that almost everyone in Gwoza congregates at a safer zone close to the council secretariat where there is enough presence of security personnel."

Umar said the gunmen, numbering over 20 and armed with AK-47 rifles, stormed the village but that they did not kill anybody.

"They simply abducted the 11 teenage girls before fleeing towards the hilly border areas between Gwoza and Cameroon Republic," he added.

Reuters also quoted another resident of Warabe, Lazarus Musa, as saying on Tuesday that gunmen invaded the village and abducted the girls.

"They were many, and all of them carried guns. They came in two vehicles painted in army colour. They started shooting in our village," Musa reportedly said.

A police source, who could not be named, also said the Warabe girls were taken away in trucks, along with looted livestock and food.

UN warns Shekau

The seizure of the 11 girls came as the world body, the United Nations, warned the Boko Haram leader, Abubakar Shekau, against selling the about 200 girls kidnapped from the Government Secondary School, Chibok, Borno State.

Shekau on Monday released a video in which he claimed that the girls, abducted from their hostels on April 14, were in his custody and threatened to sell them because he believed the pupils should not be in school but in their husbands' houses.

The UN, according to a report by *Reuters*, warned Boko Haram that selling the girls would be tantamount to slavery, a practice prohibited by international law.

The UN human rights spokesman, Rupert Colville, at a news briefing in Geneva, said, "We warn the perpetrators that there is an absolute prohibition against slavery and sexual slavery in international law. These can under certain circumstances constitute crimes against humanity.

"That means anyone responsible can be arrested, charged, prosecuted and jailed at any time in the future. So just because they think they are safe now, they won't necessarily be in two years, five years or 10 years' time."

Any buyer could also be held liable, Colville said, noting that enslaved girls were likely to be exposed to “continuous physical, psychological, economic and sexual violence” and that forced marriage could have a “devastating” impact on victims.

“The power differentials between girls and their ‘spouses’ are likely to undermine all autonomy, all freedom of will and expression of the girls. The situation they will be in will be tantamount to slavery, or slavery-like practices within the so-called marriage,” he said.

The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Navi Pillay, had written to President Goodluck Jonathan on April 28, urging him to spare no effort to ensure the girls’ safe return.

Any rescue attempt must be made in line with international human rights standards, Colville said, noting previous “allegations of excessive use of force by the Nigerian military in anti-Boko Haram operations.”

The girls were picked from their school by insurgents dressed in army uniform and drove trucks painted in military colour.

Jonathan accepts US military offer

The Presidency, meanwhile, said on Tuesday that President Goodluck Jonathan had accepted an offer made by the US President Barack Obama to deploy American security experts and equipment in Nigeria to assist in locating the schoolgirls abducted from Government Secondary School, Chibok, Borno State, on April 14.

Special Adviser to the President on Media and Publicity, Dr. Reuben Abati, said this in a statement on Tuesday.

Abati said the offer of assistance was conveyed to Jonathan by the US Secretary of State, John Kerry, in a telephone conversation he initiated on behalf of Obama.

He said shortly after the telephone conversation, the President also met with security chiefs in continuation of efforts aimed at rescuing the schoolgirls.

Abati said the President approved some of the recommendations made during the meeting for further actions.

The statement read, “President Goodluck Jonathan Tuesday welcomed and accepted a definite offer of help from the United States of America in the ongoing effort to locate and rescue the girls abducted from the Government Secondary School, Chibok three weeks ago.

“The offer from President Barack Obama, which was conveyed to President Jonathan by the United States Secretary of State, Mr. John Kerry, in a telephone conversation which began at 15.30 hours today, includes the deployment of U.S. security personnel and assets to work with their Nigerian counterparts in the search and rescue operation.

“Mr. Kerry assured President Jonathan that the United States is wholly committed to giving Nigeria all required support and assistance to save the abducted girls and bring the reign of terror unleashed on parts of the country by Boko Haram to an end.

“Thanking Mr. Kerry for the call and offer of further assistance, President Jonathan told him that Nigeria’s security agencies who were already working at full capacity to find and rescue the abducted girls would appreciate the deployment of American counter-insurgency know-how and expertise in support of their efforts.

“After speaking with the United States Secretary of State, President Jonathan today met with the Chief of Defence Staff, Service Chiefs and heads of national security agencies in continuation of the national efforts to find and rescue the abducted girls.

“The President received updates on the ongoing search and rescue effort, and gave approval for recommended further actions.”

‘FG’ll find the missing girls’

The President however also said on Tuesday that the abducted Chibok schoolgirls would be rescued and reunited with their parents.

Jonathan, who spoke while inaugurating a presidential committee on the rescue of the abducted Chibok students at the Presidential Villa, said the Federal Government would do everything to rescue the girls. The committee is chaired by Brig.-Gen. Ibrahim Sabo.

Curiously, the President’s wife, Patience, had declared on Monday that “no girl is missing” and that if the girls were missing at all the Governor of Borno State, Kassim Shetima, should search for them.

The President said, “I am appreciative of the fact that this sad incident has attracted global outrage. This is a clear testimony to the fact that humanity can come together and stand as one against evil, no matter how it is presented.

“This is the time when we must bond together beyond all political, religious or regional divide against our common enemy. We must remain vigilant and be ready to assist security agencies and authorities at all time.

“We must keep supporting the families who for seeking education for their daughters are undergoing untold pains at this moment.

“Let me assure the families and our dear daughters that in conjunction with international community, government will do everything possible to get our girls back.”

The President clarified that the committee was neither a judicial committee nor an administrative panel.

Meanwhile, representatives of the Borno State Government and the UN were absent from the inauguration.

While the state government was asked to nominate two representatives, preferably women, the UN was asked to nominate one representative.

The committee’s terms of reference include: to liaise with the Borno State Government and establish the circumstances leading to the school remaining open for boarding students when other schools were closed; to liaise with relevant authorities and the parents of the missing girls to establish the actual number and identities of the girls abducted; and to interface with the Security Services and Borno State Government to ascertain how many of the missing girls have returned;

Others are to mobilise the surrounding communities and the general public on citizen support for a rescue strategy and operation; to articulate a framework for a multi-stakeholder action for the rescue of the missing girls; and to advise the Federal Government on any matter incidental to the terms of reference.

North-East leaders at the Villa

Meanwhile, some elders from the North-East part of the country, led by a former Minister of Finance, Mallam Adamu Ciroma, met behind closed doors with the President on Tuesday in continuation of efforts to end insurgency in the zone.

Three states of the zone, Adamawa, Borno and Yobe are currently under emergency rule, declared by Jonathan in May 2013, following escalating violence.

Those who attended the meeting did not speak with journalists at the end of the consultation that lasted for about two hours.

On the delegation were Prof. Jubril Aminu, Alhaji Shettima Mustapha, Ambassador Babangana Kingibe, Alhaji Ibrahim Bunu, Alhaji Khalifa Yusuf and Alhaji Muhammed Kirfi, among others.