

Abuja taxi drivers block roads, protest colleague's killing

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Adelani Adepegba , Abuja

Movements on major roads in Abuja were blocked on Wednesday by taxi drivers protesting against alleged shooting of their colleague by men of the Joint Task Force at Wuse, a commercial hub in the city.

The angry protesters made bonfires on the Murtala Muhammed Expressway, the Herbert Macaulay Way and Berger Roundabout, paralysing vehicular movement, as well as commercial activities in the areas.

Although the details of the shooting of the unidentified driver were sketchy, the protest started from the scene of the alleged incident with the protesting drivers blocking the roads with their vehicles and disused tyres which they used to make the bonfires.

Some drivers, who spoke with our correspondent, said the protest was also to show their displeasure at the constant harassment and intimidation by the JTF, which was set up to rid the Federal Capital Territory of miscreants.

The Treasurer, National Union of Road Transport Workers, Berger Unit branch 2, Kareem Adesanya, said the JTF operatives were fond of extorting money from cab drivers, adding that the soldiers assaulted them and damaged their vehicles for no reason.

He said, “The Joint Task Force men have always extorted money from our members. If they arrested a driver, they would extort at least N7,000 without issuing any receipt. What happened today (Wednesday) was that they shot a driver at Wuse and whisked him away; nobody knows if he died or not.”

Adesanya said his union had complained to the Federal Capital Territory Minister, Mohammed Bello, without any response, adding that the drivers were tired of the harassment by the security operatives.

A driver, Olajide Aderemi, said the JTF had arrested him thrice, adding that he paid N6,000 each time he was arrested.

He said the JTF once damaged his vehicle and destroyed the engine after it was driven several kilometres without water in the radiator.

“They abandoned the car at the National Stadium, Abuja, after they had destroyed the engine and they still collected N6,000 from me. They never told me the crime I committed; they simply hijacked the vehicle at Lugbe and abandoned it at the stadium,” he said.

Two drivers, Olarenwaju Abdul and Anthony Eya, decried the ruthless manner the JTF operatives treat Abuja cab drivers, noting that they had no respect for their rights as citizens.

They asked the FCT administration to create motor parks, noting that many vacant spaces could be converted into loading bays for taxi drivers.

The blockade on the Murtala Expressway was later removed by some youths on the instructions of a combined team of soldiers and policemen which had earlier used tear gas to disperse the stone-throwing protesters.

An activist, Augustine Okechukwu, called on the FCT minister to withdraw the JTF personnel from Abuja streets.



“The minister should caution the JTF or withdraw them from the streets; the drivers’ union has leaders who he could invite to a meeting to address the issue of extortion and harassment by the JTF personnel,” the activist said.

Also, the Foundation for Peace Professionals lamented the fracas between the task force members and cab operators.

The Executive Director of the foundation, Abdulrazaq Hamzat, in a statement also condemned the alleged harassment of taxi drivers by the security operatives and called for the arrest and prosecution of the soldier that allegedly shot the cab operator.

The foundation said its findings indicated that that the task force had been extorting money from members of the public around Wuse Market for a long time.

It demanded a review of the operation of the task force.

When contacted about the alleged shooting, the Chief Press Secretary to the Minister, Cosmas Uzodinma, said he was trying to get to the root of the matter and promised to give an update later.

Meanwhile, the police in Abuja have commenced investigation into the riot.

The command said some hoodlums that had wanted to take advantage of the protest to cause mayhem had been apprehended.

The FCT Police Public Relations Officer, Anjuguri Manzah, in a statement on Wednesday said police operatives had restored normalcy in Wuse and environs.

He however did not give the number of those arrested.

Manzah said, “Contrary to speculations making the rounds, members of the public should note that no life was lost and nobody was injured, while the situation has been brought under control.

“It is also pertinent to state that some hoodlums who were trying to take advantage of the false rumour to cause problem in the FCT have been arrested and investigation is in progress.”