

Zamfara killings: There'll be more bloodshed, bandit says in secret tape with emir

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A suspected leader of the bandits responsible for the killings in Zamfara State has vowed that there will be more killings in the state as long as the Federal Government continues to deploy the military and other security forces in the troubled area.

He made this known during a secret conversation with an emir in Zamfara State, a copy of the recording was obtained exclusively by *Saturday PUNCH*.

In the secret tape, the bandit opposed the deployment of troops in their communities, saying it would worsen the crisis.

The suspect, who spoke with the emir in Hausa, in the secret recording obtained from a top military source at the Defence Headquarters, Abuja, argued that peace would not reign when “you call the police, soldiers and law enforcement agents to our villages; it will continue to cause more bloodshed”.

Although the military source alleged that the emir in the audio is from Zurmi, one of the troubled local government areas in the state, the name of the emir was not mentioned throughout the recording.

The Minister of Defence, Mansur Dan-Ali, through his Public Relations Officer, Col Tukur Gusau, on Sunday said the Federal Government had some security reports on some community leaders linked to the bandits killing people in the state.

The ministry said the reports “could not be divulged to the public”, noting that the earlier statement by Dan-Ali on some traditional rulers aiding bandits should not be seen as derogatory but as a warning.

But traditional rulers in the state, under the Zamfara State Council of Chiefs, last week told the military to name the monarchs aiding the gangsters.

They also claimed that the Nigerian Air Force fighter jets bombed innocent civilians in their villages instead of the bandits.

On Wednesday, the traditional rulers released the names of “11 innocent civilians who were killed in air strikes on Dumburum community in Zurmi Local Government Area of the state on April 9”.

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They listed the victims as Daji Barau, Na Bumburum, Suwaiba Alka, Yar Guru, Maryam Shafiu, Dahe Sule, Dan Kurma, Zaliha Dumburum, Aisha Akilu, Alamin Alka and Fati Gum.

The monarchs through the Emir of Bungudu, Alhaji Hassan Attahiru, had called for an independent investigation into the matter to verify their claims.

But the NAF on Thursday denied the claims, saying the Chief of Air Staff, Air Marshal Sadique Abubakar, had constituted a panel to investigate the monarch’s claims.

Meanwhile, in the secret recording of a dialogue between the bandit leader and the emir, they advocated a peace meeting between village residents and herders or people hiding in the bushes.

The bandit said in Hausa, “God has already given you a position (as an emir) and when you talk, people listen. You have some poor masses in the bushes. This violence started happening in our state about six years ago or so.

“They killed my people, they killed my relations, they killed my wives, my children. They killed some of my cows. I ran away when they killed my people. Then I involved myself in the activities of these terrorist groups. Now, I have escaped and back in my community. Will you not accept me as a member of this community?”

The emir replied, “Aka ne (yes, that is it).”

The bandit continued, “You should call your chiefs and bring your people from the bushes and from the village. Anywhere you meet us, advise the people of the community to join hands with the Miyetti Allah association. This land will be peaceful.

“If they make it this way, peace will reign. But to say you will call police and soldiers to Zamfara, this will not bring peace. It will continue to cause more bloodshed.”

The emir replied again, “Aka ne (yes, that is it).”

The bandit said, “Sometimes, you hear that they bombed a place where the bandits are camping. But the next day, the bandits will still come and strike in another place, close to where they bombed.”

The emir said, “We also are not in support of the bombings.”

The bandit continued, “The reason why their bombing will not work is because before their helicopter comes around, information has already reached us. Before the helicopter leaves any base, the information will reach us and even where it will land. If they bomb any place, they will kill only birds and animals which are there.

“Also on land, soldiers were sent to attack us. But before they come, information has reached us. We know how we will attack them and know all areas where they will follow. We want you to ban anything vigilantes.

“People are surprised that they use airplanes to attack us but we are just like ants. They can’t see us; it is God that is helping us.”

The emir replied, “Killing human beings is not good. I have heard your grievances and it is a load on me and I will try to unite the people of the community. We will still call you together to deliberate on it. I will try to ban vigilantes in any other place and I will give the feedback to the government.”

The NAF said despite the claims by the emirs, its fighter jets would continue to pound the hideouts of bandits in the North-West until the hoodlums were flushed out.

The NAF Director of Public Relations and Information, Air Commodore Ibikunle Daramola, in an interview with our correspondent, said, “We will not take issue with esteemed traditional rulers. But if they say something that is not true, we must correct that. It took a lot of encouragement for the personnel to continue, because they were quite disheartened by the allegations.

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“We follow due process to ensure that it is only the criminals that are taken out by the air strikes. We remain resolute and we will continue our operations. Operations were conducted on Friday and will be conducted tomorrow (Saturday). There is no stand down in any way. Air strikes will continue on identified targets within Zamfara State and its environs until all of these activities are put to a stop.”

Troops kill seven bandits

Troops on Thursday killed seven suspected bandits during a gunfight with the hoodlums in Aljumana Fulani and Ketere villages in Zamfara State.

Our correspondents learnt that the troops encountered the bandits while on clearance operation in Aljumana Fulani and Ketere villages as well as in Kara market in the Shinkafi Local Government Area of the state.

According to the Nigerian Army on Friday, the bandits were armed with sophisticated weapons.

The military said apart from the seven shot dead, others fled with gunshot wounds, abandoning their camp and logistics, which were destroyed by the troops.

Our correspondents learnt that during the gun battle, a soldier was killed, with six others injured.

During the encounters, the troops reportedly recovered 934 rounds of 7.62mm ammunition, one AK-47 rifle, one steel chain used by the bandits to restrain their kidnapped victims and seven motorcycles.

It was learnt that the troops thereafter apprehended three suspected informants of the bandits.

The Assistant Director, Army Public Relations, Maj Clement Abiade, said in a statement, “In continuation of the ongoing Operations Sharan Daji and Harbin Kunama 3, troops of the Nigerian Army Deep Blue Special Forces, Nigerian Air Force component and vigilantes neutralised seven bandits on Thursday.

“The bandits were killed during a fierce encounter while on a clearance operation in Aljumana Fulani and Ketere villages.

“Sadly, during the operations, one soldier paid the supreme sacrifice, while six others and a vigilante who sustained varying degrees of injury are receiving medical attention.”

NAF panel meets personnel in Katsina

The seven-man panel set up by the Chief of Air Staff to investigate the allegations that innocent civilians were killed in Zamfara State in air strikes on bandits' locations on Friday, commenced work by meeting with airmen involved in the offensive against bandits in Katsina.

The Chairman of the panel, Air Vice-Marshal Isa Lubo, told reporters at the Umaru Musa Yar'Adua International Airport in Katsina before going into a closed-door meeting with the airmen that his team was in Katsina to find out what really happened.

He said, “The Chief of Air Staff has asked us to ascertain the genuineness or otherwise of the allegations that there were civilian casualties.

“We are here to promote peace in the entire North-West. During our fact-finding exercise, we shall meet our officials involved in the current operation against bandits to tell us what exactly happened.

“ We are meeting with the emir here. We are also going to meet with villagers at Dumburum.

“You know that carrying out attacks in a location where bandits mingle with civilians is a difficult situation. But we shall unravel the truth.

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“During the course of our investigation, if it means we need to change our tactics in our operations, we shall recommend it.

“We are submitting the report of our findings latest by next week Thursday.”

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