

Niger school invasion: Bandits tied 42 abductees in pairs, fled to bush on motorbikes — Resident

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Government Science College, Kagara, Niger State after gunmen's abduction of 27 students and 15 workers...on Wednesday. Photos: Adebayo Ayinde

Our correspondents

A resident, who witnessed the kidnapping of 27 students and 15 workers of Government Science College, Kagara in the Rafi Local Government Area of Niger State, has described how the kidnappers tied their victims in pairs and took them away.

The man, who lives close to the school, confided in *The PUNCH* on Wednesday that the bandits, who wore military uniform, stormed the school at 2am.

When one of our correspondents got to the school at 2pm on Wednesday, he observed that many buildings including classrooms and hostels were dilapidated.

The source, who described how the incident occurred, disclosed that before moving to the GSS Kagara, the bandits had parked their motorcycles close to Attahiru Secondary School, a distance of one kilometre to the GSS Kagara.

He stated, “When they (the victims) were being taken away, I saw that they were tied in pairs and marched to where the motorcycles were parked from where they were taken into the bush.”

A worker of the school, who spoke on condition of anonymity, told *The PUNCH* that the gunmen entered the school from the rear, where the fence had fallen.

According to him, they headed to the staff quarters, where 15 workers, including teachers, were kidnapped before going to students’ hostel.

According to the source, a senior secondary school 3, Benjamin Abila, who raised the alarm when the bandits were approaching the hostel was shot dead.

“They abducted 27 students in the hostel and tied all the abductees in pairs before taking them out of the school,” the source stated.

Another source lamented the dilapidation of the school, saying it was prone to bandits’ attacks.

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Khamis Tahir, parent of a worker in the school, in an interview with *The PUNCH*, said “ I got a call that kidnappers had invaded the Government Science College, Kagara. Immediately after my prayer, I moved down to the school. I realised that my daughter together with some students had been kidnapped. We are here and many security agents have been moving up and down here”, but up till now we have not heard anything.”

The state Governor, Abubakar Sani Bello, after a security meeting in Minna, the state capital, ordered the immediate closure of boarding schools in four local government areas of the state, which had witnessed increased kidnappings.

The local government areas affected are Rafi, Mariga, Munya and Shiroro.

Bello said the action was necessary to save lives of the students as the areas had already been taken over by bandits.

The governor appealed to the President, Major General Muhammadu Buhari (retd.), to deploy necessary mechanism in flushing out the bandits.

He ruled out payment of ransom to free the abducted students and workers, saying the state government adopted the policy to discourage the kidnappers from using the proceeds of their crime to purchase more weapons.

Also on Wednesday, the governor met with a Kaduna based cleric, Sheikh Ahmad Gumi, at the Government House, Minna.

After the meeting, Gumi told journalists that he would visit Kagara, where the 27 students were kidnapped.

“The governor and I spoke on several ways to deal with insecurity in a holistic manner and find solutions to the insecurity problem in the state,” the cleric stated.

Buhari has dispatched security officials to Niger – Aide

Meanwhile, the Senior Special Assistant to the President on Media and Publicity, Garba Shehu, on Wednesday said the President had directed the Armed Forces and Police to ensure immediate and safe return of abducted students.

He said the President had also dispatched to Minna a team of security chiefs to coordinate the rescue operation and meet with state officials and other stakeholders.

Shehu announced this in a statement titled, “President Buhari condemns school abduction in Niger State, dispatches security officials to the state.”

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The statement read in part, “President Muhammadu Buhari has received reports of the brazen attack on Government Science College, Kagara, Rafi Local Government Area of Niger State, following which a yet to be ascertained number of staff and students have been abducted by gunmen.

“Following these reports, the President has directed the Armed Forces and Police, to ensure immediate and safe return of all the captives.

“The President has also dispatched to Minna, Niger State a team of security chiefs to coordinate the rescue operation and meet with state officials, community leaders, as well as parents and staff of the College.

“President Buhari has assured all of the support of his administration to the Armed Forces in their brave struggle against terrorism and banditry and urged them to do all that can be done to bring an end to this saga, and avoid such cowardly attacks on schools in the future.”

Shehu also quoted the President as saying that his prayers were with families of the victims of the attack as he condemned “as cowardly the attack on innocent school children.”

Declare emergency on security, Senate tells Buhari

Meanwhile, the Senate on Wednesday asked the President to declare a state of emergency on security without further delay.

The red chamber made the call following a point of order by Senator Sani Musa (APC, Niger East), on the abduction of students and teachers of the GSS Kagara.

Musa said the terrorist who whisked their victims away were dressed in military uniforms. The Senator said security agencies had explained that they were on the trail of the criminals.

The Senate demanded the implementation of its ad hoc resolution on security and urged the combined team of military and police to set up an operation to destroy criminal camps across the country.

Senator Sabi Abdullahi, also from Niger State, said the kidnappers and bandits were emboldened by the successes being recorded in the state, in recent times as about 100 people had so far been kidnapped in the state.

He said the forest from the Federal Capital Territory extended to Niger State up to Zamfara State, was being used by the criminals.

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He said the fact that the bandits had invaded Niger State was an indication that safety of lives and property of the FCT residents was being threatened.

FG not competent to handle security – Senator

Senator Bima Enagi, also from Niger State, declared that the Buhari regime was incompetent to handle security challenges in the country.

He said, “We need to amend the constitution so that governors should be chief security officers of their states since the government at the centre has failed to protect lives and property of Nigerians.

“ The Federal Government is busy giving palliatives instead of creating employment, thus aggravating insecurity.

The President of the Senate, Ahmad Lawan, described the kidnap of the students as unfortunate.

He, however, said the security agencies had challenges of personnel and funds.

He said, “Abductions of students from school happen in northern part of Nigeria.

“With incidents like this, parents would be scared to take their wards to school and the efforts of the past and present leaders at providing education would be defeated.

“Service chiefs have to secure the schools and have to carry the states along.”

Musa had in his motion noted that the security agencies had been able to detect the area where the students were taken to, and have started tracing the bandits.

Rise up and repel bandits, kidnappers, FG charges Nigerians

The Federal Government has called Nigerians to defend themselves against bandits, kidnappers and other criminals across the country.

The Minister of Defence, Major General Bashir Magashi (retd.), stated in an interview with journalists at the House of Representatives, after the screening of the new service chiefs.

He said, “We have demonstrated our ability to take on the challenge. We have done it in Katsina; when children were kidnapped, within two days, we got them back. Hopefully, this time, we will do the same (thing) to get this these captives back. I am sure that before the end of the day, we will be given a full brief on what is going on in Niger State.”

Magashi, while responding to the rising spate of insecurity across the country, urged Nigerians to repel criminals when they attacked them.

The minister asked, “Is it the responsibility of the military alone? It is the responsibility of everybody to be alert and ensure safety when necessary. But we shouldn’t be cowards. At times, the bandits will come with only about three rounds of ammunition and when they fire shots, everybody will run. In our younger days, we stand to fight any aggression coming to us. I don’t know why

people are running away from minor, minor aggressions? They should stand and let these people (criminals) know that the people – villagers- have the competence and capability to defend themselves.”

Magashi, however, noted that government would ensure that Nigerians were protected as well as the territorial integrity of the county.

When asked if civilians would be allowed to carry firearms to protect themselves, the minister said, “It is an issue even in the developed countries; they are still debating on it, whether to continue or stop. But I don’t advice Nigerians to use firearms for internal use.”

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Niger abduction aimed at depriving north education – Northern govs

Also, northern states governors have condemned the abduction of students, describing it as a deliberate plot to deprive the region education.

In a statement issued in Jos on Wednesday by the Chairman of Northern Governors’ Forum and Governor of Plateau State, Simon Lalong, expressed sadness over the development.

He stated, “We totally condemn the abduction of the school children who did nothing wrong than go to school to seek education. This is a sad and reprehensible act that must not be tolerated whatever the motive of the criminals. It is an act that further compounds the efforts to enroll more children into schools particularly in the Northern region where illiteracy is very high and enrolment is gradually appreciating after sustained efforts by government and development partners.”

In a related development, the Federal Government has declared that it will deploy all resources at its disposal in ensuring the release of all the kidnapped victims.

It also stated that would not surrender its sovereignty to any group or individual disturbing the peace of the nation.

The FG said this in Minna when it sent a delegation to Niger State over the kidnapping of Kagara students and teachers.

The four-man delegation comprised Minister of Information, Lai Mohammed; Minister of Interior, Ogbeni Raji Aregbesola; the National Security Adviser, Baba Gana Muguno and the Inspector General of Police, Mohammed Adamu.

Mohammed expressed satisfaction over the immediate step taken by the governor after the attack while assuring that the Federal Government would leave no stone unturned to ensure the safety of lives and property in the state and country.

“We have been sent by the President to assure the people and government of Niger State and Nigeria that the administration will leave no stone unturned to ensure the safety of lives and properties in the country.

“We are glad at what we have witnessed, that the state government is exploring kinetic and non kinetic options to ensure the safe release of the victims. On our part as the federal government, we will deploy all resources to ensure the safe release of the victims.

“We want to assure you that we will not surrender its sovereignty but will employ all means to ensure the safe release of all the victims across Nigeria.”

Muguno who noted that the incidents were becoming too frequent stated that the federal government will deploy everything at its disposal both kinetic and non kinetic means and reconciliatory measures to ensure the students and other victims are returned back safely.

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“The incidents are becoming too frequent. Within the span of 90 days, we have these incidents, one in Kankara and one here. This gives a lot of people the feeling that something has to be done.

“The President is ready to apply whatever it takes to make Nigeria safe and secure. We will apply the non kinetic measures but although we are looking at non kinetic measures does not mean that security won’t carry out their statutory measures. Which is to safeguard the security of Nigerian for

as long as this government remains in this office, it will have no choice but to apply every measures to secure the lives of the people.”

The Inspector General of Police said that the incident in Niger was a cause of concern to all adding that the security agencies were strategizing on how to bring the students and other Abducted victims back safely.

He said that the same strategy used during the Kakara would be employed in this case.

“What is happening in Niger State is an issue of concern. A lot of startegy is put in place. We are working to ensure that the students are returned unharmed.

“We are using the same strategy as we used in the past case but it won’t stop us from apprehending those who committed the act. We have deployed four units of mobile policemen to reinforce security in the state.”

Appreciating the delegation from the Federal Government, Bello applauded the Presidency for responding to the cry of the people promptly.

He lamented over the surge in banditry and kidnapping in the state, adding that the state was doing its best to secure the release of the victims of both cases.

He stressed that the government was committed to do whatever it could to ensure the safe return of the children and workers abducted

“I am confident that with the effort so far that we will secure the release of the children and other victims at the shortest possible time.”

The governor later on Wednesday visited the school.

Abduction in schools: NUT threatens strike in affected states

The Nigeria Union of Teachers on Wednesday expressed regret over the reported abduction of students and teachers of the GSS Kangara.

While calling on the Federal Government urgently declare a state of emergency on security situation in the country, the NUT warned that it “will not hesitate to withdraw the services of all teachers in the affected states of the federation”, if the security situation in schools and colleges were not guaranteed.

The NUT also faulted the strategy being deployed by security agencies saying it fell short of expectation, considering that the Kagara abduction has just occurred while Nigeria was yet to fully contend with the December 2020 abduction of students in Government Science Secondary School in Kankara, Katsina State.

The Secretary-General of NUT, Dr. Mike Ene, raised these views in a statement entitled: “Terrorists’ attacks on schools and abduction of students/teachers: One incident too many.”

He said, “It has become imperative for all tiers of government to put all hands on deck. We therefore call on state governments to use part of their security voters to employ alternate security service to complement existing security agencies in policing our schools.

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“We must warn that if the security situation in our schools and colleges is not guaranteed, the NUT will not hesitate to withdraw the services of all teachers in the affected states of the federation.

“The union is worried and greatly concerned over the increasing state of insecurity across the country, where attacks on soft target such as schools are fast becoming danger spot for bandit and other criminal elements in Nigeria.

“The NUT is alarmed by this brazen attack which has left a number of families and relatives distressed. We call on the Federal Government to as a matter of urgency declare a state of emergency on security situation in the country.

“The current strategy deployed by our security agencies fall short of expectation considering that the Kagara abduction has just occurred while the nation is yet to fully contend with the December, 2020 abduction of students in Government Science Secondary School Kankara Katsina state.

“Such criminal elements have no place in a civilised society such as Nigeria. The Federal Government must deploy the full weight of our nations security apparatus to ensure the safe return of our abducted students and teachers.

“Furthermore steps must be taken to completely eliminate all forms of security threats to our schools. We wish to reiterate that teaching and learning can only be guaranteed in an atmosphere safety and security.”