

# Shi'ites clash with soldiers, police in Abuja, allege eight members killed

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Photos: Olatunji Obasa

EIGHT persons were feared dead on Tuesday in Abuja during a confrontation between the Islamic Movement of Nigeria popularity called Shi'ites and security agencies after a procession by the Shi'ites.

The police said a total of 57 suspects; 39 males and 18 females, were arrested and currently being profiled at the State Criminal Investigations Department of the FCT Police Command.

The police said a golf vehicle, flags, petrol bombs, weapons, mobile phones, charms, were recovered as exhibits.

The Shi'ite members were said to have embarked on Arbaeen Symbolic Trek, an annual event to mark the fortieth day of the murder of Imam Hussein, the grandson of Prophet Muhammad who was killed on 10th Muharram when the clash occurred.

The incident, which occurred at Gwarinpa gate, near Galadimawa, along Kubwa expressway, caused panic as residents and motorists scamper for safety.

While IMN alleged that eight persons were killed, the police denied it.

The Secretary, Academic Forum of IMN, Abdullahi Musa, during a press conference in Abuja on Tuesday evening, said they were allegedly attacked by a combined team of operatives of the Army, Police and Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps.

While threatening to seek redress in court over the incident, he put the number of persons reportedly killed at eight.

He said, “The perpetrators must be brought to book; we will go to court. We started yesterday (Monday), it ended peacefully. Today (Tuesday) being the last day, we came out to conclude the trekking.

“We started from Gwarinpa Model City gate around 9am; we marched down to Gwarimpa main bus-stop, and that is where we terminated the trekking and everything was over.

“Closing prayer had been recited and people have started dispersing. Unfortunately, a combination of police and soldiers arrived around 10am. The soldiers were behind the police; they started shooting teargas, while the soldiers started shooting live bullets.

“The brutality they meted out was of different level. First, they doused people with tear-gas, started shooting live ammunition, gunning down many. Eight were confirmed dead, tens of scores injured and numerous arrested.

“They even carted away some corpses to an unknown location. A woman, a passer-by, was pierced by an RPG. It was all bare cruelty.

“In spite of all the brutality, Arba’een Symbolic trek cannot be stopped for what it stands for. The purpose of the trek is to recall and equally experience the trial and tribulation faced by the Household of the Holy Prophet.

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“They shot in the air first; people started running. They shot at the people directly, injuring many and killed about eight persons. They left with two dead bodies.

“The soldiers that joined the police in this killing are Guard Brigade and they are only answerable to Mr. President. So, President Muhammadu Buhari is responsible for killings today in Abuja because the Guard Brigade is only answerable to him.”

On whether they informed the police of their procession, Musa said there was no need informing the police because they (police) will still attack them (Shi'ites).

A resident of the Gwarinpa, Ifeoma Eze said, “They said Shi'ites were rounding off their annual procession. No vehicle could move. The protesters blocked the road which led to heavy traffic in the area. The police and soldiers came around to send them away.

“Before we knew it, we started hearing gunshots and we had to run for our lives. There was tension everywhere, shops were shut. I learnt people died but I don't know the exact figures. Some are saying two, while others are saying four.”

However, the FCT Police Command spokesperson, Josephine Adeh, in a statement, said the Shi'ite members attacked the security forces with petrol bombs and other weapons, including stones, adding that 57 were arrested by the security operatives without any casualty.

She added that petrol bombs and other weapons were recovered from them.

The statement read, "The FCT Police Command in a joint operation with other security agencies has restored normalcy to the Gwarinpa area of the FCT and other parts of the capital where miscreants identified to be members of the Islamic Movement of Nigeria caused unnecessary hardship to motorists and other road users as well as individuals going about their lawful businesses.

"The miscreants who were found in their numbers were promptly intercepted by the security operatives and dispersed to prevent them from causing further disruption of public order and peace and damage to public and private assets.

"A total of 57 suspects; 39 males and 18 females, were arrested and currently being profiled at the SCID of the FCT Police Command. A golf vehicle, flags, petrol bombs, weapons, mobile phones and charms were recovered as exhibits."