

Kaduna village bombing: Protesters storm N'Assembly, AI threatens suit, deaths reach 127

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Protesters stormed the National Assembly on Wednesday to express sadness over the accidental bombing of Tudun Biri in the Igabi Local Government Area of Kaduna State on Sunday night by the Nigerian Army.

It was also gathered that the death toll from the incident had climbed to 127, as Amnesty International threatened to take legal action against the Federal Government if it

Survivors receiving treatment at the Barau Dikko Teaching Hospital, Kaduna on Tuesday. Photo: Godwin Isenyo.

This came as the United Nations enjoined the military to protect the lives of citizens across the country and reduce the incidents of accidental killings by the armed forces in Nigeria.

An air strike intended to flush out terrorists had on Sunday night accidentally hit civilians during a religious celebration at Tudun Biri.

In Abuja on Wednesday, protesters stormed the National Assembly premises in reaction to the Sunday bombing.

They occupied the National Assembly entrance for more than two hours, demanded justice for the victims, and challenged the Minister of Defence, Abubakar Badaru, to either live up to his responsibility or resign.

The leader of the protesters under the aegis of the National Youth Council of Nigeria, North West Zone, and Arewa Youth Movement, Nasir Ishaku, told journalists that the groups were at the National Assembly to demand justice for the victims.

He said, "For those who have eyes to see, let them see well, and those who have ears to hear, let them listen attentively. Nigeria is not well because Nigerians are being killed day by day.

"The security situation in the country keeps deteriorating since his (Badaru) inception as Minister of Defence. These two organisations have a moral obligation to express our grievances because Nigeria is in a shambles in terms of the security of lives and property, most especially, in Northern Nigeria.

"Nigeria keeps losing members of the armed forces which include the Army, the Air Force, the Navy, and members of the Nigeria Police Force. Our university students are still in captivity and no one knows their whereabouts. These are the clear indications that the minister is incompetent to handle that sensitive ministry. Therefore, he should wake up to his responsibilities or resign."

Reacting to the incident on Wednesday, Amnesty International said it was compiling the list of deceased persons and would make it public after the details had been verified.

It disclosed this through its Country Director, Mr Isah Sanusi, adding that Amnesty International had asked the Federal Government to investigate the killing and would take further legal actions if its demands were not met.

He said, "We are compiling the list of the deceased and will publish it once we confirm the names. There are procedures for taking legal action. We have made demands from the government to investigate the killings and if they don't do it, we will take further legal actions."

Death toll

The death toll rose to 127 on Wednesday, as scores of injured persons were taken to the Barau Dikko Teaching Hospital in Kaduna.

One of the survivors, Abubakar Saleh, told one of our correspondents that more injured persons were brought into the facility on Wednesday.

According to him, many were picked up in the forest and brought to the hospital.

He said the number of injured persons had increased to 75, adding that one person died on Wednesday.

"Some have been moved to 44 Reference military hospital, One division Nigeria military facility, while some are in Barau Specialist Hospital," he said.

Meanwhile, an Imam in Tubun Biri, Alhaji Ahmed Sanusi, said no fewer than 100 persons were buried three days ago, while 20 more bodies were recovered by the search team and buried on Tuesday.

He added that as of Wednesday, another six bodies were recovered and buried, while another person died at Barau Dikko Teaching Hospital, bringing the death toll to 127.

"Three days ago, we buried about 100; and on Tuesday, 20 and by Wednesday, we picked up 6 and one died in the hospital this morning," he said.

N29.21bn compensation

The Federal Government may pay about N29.21bn for the about 127 persons who were killed by the accidental bombing on Sunday night.

The National President of the Miyetti Allah Cattle Breeders Association of Nigeria, Othman Ngelzarma, told one of our correspondents that according to Islamic laws, known as Diya, each of the victims was worth about N230m.

Diya in Islamic law, is the financial compensation paid to the victim or heirs of a victim in the cases of murder, bodily harm, or property damage by mistake.

He said, "Human life cannot be quantified, but going by the Islamic conditions it is very clear that for every human life lost, there is a specified amount that can be paid, depending on the time. Islamically, I know that today every human life is killed, the cost of Diya, as we call it in Islam, is close to N230m per person.

"However, Nigeria is a secular state, so we don't know what yardstick the government can adopt in terms of how much it is going to pay for the victims, but Islamically what I told you is the condition, the amount is close to N230m per person.

"The amount increases and decreases. It is assessed by the price of gold and the rest. So if gold is up, the compensation will be up; if it is down, the compensation will come down. So what was paid as compensation last year or the last 10 years may not be what will be paid as compensation today.

"Today it is close to N230m, but maybe last year it may not be more than N100m, and maybe in the last 10 years, it may not be up to N100m. It is something that is influenced by the cost of gold, as I stated earlier."

On whether the group had at any time discussed with the government as regards compensation for some of its members who were killed by accidental military bombings in the past, Ngelzarma said such discussions could only be held when the government takes responsibility for the bombings.

Asked whether members of MACBAN were affected in the last incident, the association's president stated that his group had drafted some officials to Kaduna to confirm.

On his part, a former Chief Imam of Apo Legislative Quarters Mosque, Sheikh Muhammad Nuru Khalid, asked the Federal Government to pay the Islamic compensation to 127 Nigerians killed in the Kaduna Village bombing.

The Imam who noted that this must be done in accordance with Nigerian law and Islamic principles, said this was important because the victims were killed during an Islamic function.

He stated "Yes there is a need for compensation. But I want to suggest that we have to look at the laws that are guiding our country and then consider it with that of the Islamic principles of compensation.

The Jama'atu Nasril Islam, JNI, said since it was not an Islamic government that was in power, it would be left for the Federal Government to decide on how much to pay as compensation to those who lost their lives.

According to the JNI Secretary-General, Prof Khalid Abubakar-Aliyu, the onus now lies on the Federal Government to decide how much compensation to pay deceased families.

Meanwhile, the Barau Dikko Teaching Hospital, Kaduna has been overstretched following the influx of injured persons who were rushed to the facility in the wake of the bombing.

The PUNCH check in the hospital showed that the hospital had no capacity to receive and treat the over 60 injured taken on admission to the facility.

Our correspondent who visited the hospital observed that the hospital was overwhelmed such that survivors were being referred to the 44 Army Reference Hospital in the state capital.

UN condemns bombing

Meanwhile, the United Nations has urged the military to review its rules of engagement to avoid the recurrence of an airstrike on a community in Kaduna State that killed several civilians.

The United Nations Human Rights Office on Wednesday condemned the incident, adding that it was the most recent of at least four bombings that resulted in severe civilian casualties since 2017.

UN Human Rights Office spokesperson, Seif Magango, also urged the military to review its rules of engagement.

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“While we note that the authorities have termed the civilian deaths as accidental, we call on them to take all feasible steps in the future to ensure civilians and civilian infrastructure are protected.

“They must review rules of engagement and standard operating procedures to ensure that such incidents do not happen again,” Magango said.

The military said troops were carrying out aerial patrols when they observed a group of people and “misinterpreted their pattern of activities to be similar to that of the bandits” before the drone strike was launched.

“There are serious concerns as to whether so-called ‘pattern of life’ strikes sufficiently complies with international law.”

The military often relies on airstrikes in their battle against bandit militias in the northwest and northeast of the country, where jihadists have been fighting for more than a decade.

“We urge the Nigerian authorities to thoroughly and impartially investigate all alleged violations of international human rights and international humanitarian law, including deaths and injuries from air force strikes, and hold those found responsible to account,” he noted.

None of the families of the IDPs killed or injured by the accidental Air Force plane bombing of the IDP camp at Rann in the Kala-Balge Local Government Area of Borno State, on January 17, 2017, have been compensated.

115 persons, including six Red Cross aid workers, were reported to have been killed by the bombing.

However, the spokesman for the Rann community, Prof Mohammed Abba Jimme, Deputy Director, Center for Arid Zone Studies, University of Maiduguri, confirmed to The PUNCH that 136 people, including the aid workers, died.

He could not give the number of victims living who lost limbs to the bombing, but confirmed that they include one of his uncles, Mohammed Abuwa, a school headmaster, now crippled.

“Up to this moment, no compensation has been paid to the families of the dead and to those injured,” he complained.

“In fact I am taking a comprehensive inventory of those affected, dead or injured, and the properties destroyed with a view to pursuing for compensation,” he said.

“I am already seeking legal guidance on this,” Jimme disclosed.

“You talked of troops dying at the front lines entitled to death insurance; what I intend to pursue the IDPs affected by the Rann bombing is more than compensation; it is called Diyya (the Islamic method of compensation for those killed by such accidents,” the Rann Community spokesman said.

On the amount that should be paid, he stated, “That is why I told you I am seeking legal guidance, which includes how to do it Islamically; I am seeking full explanation because I don’t want to make any mistake about the Diyya.”

Independent enquiry

The Peoples Democratic Party has called for an independent inquiry into the Kaduna Village bombing.

The party in a statement by its National Publicity Secretary, Debo Ologunagba on Wednesday described the incident as heartrending and agonizing given that the victims were harmless Nigerians who were observing their religious rites.

Ologunagba also urged the Federal Government to declare a day of national mourning in memory of the dead.

The PDP noted that the fact that the area was bombed twice raised serious concerns and questions that border on intelligence gathering, information processing, synergy, command, and operation control coordination in the security system.

The statement read in part “The PDP calls on the Federal Government to immediately commence an independent system-wide inquiry to dispassionately investigate this sad and unfortunate episode.

“Our party deeply commiserates with the families of the victims of the bombing and prays for the speedy recovery of the wounded.

“The PDP condoles with the Government and people of Kaduna State, particularly the Tudun Biri Community, and urges the Federal Government to take necessary steps to compensate the families of the dead as well as provide urgent medical attention to the wounded.

“Our party also demands that the Federal Government declare a day of national mourning in memory of the dead.”

Ologunagba who demanded more professionalism in the battle against terrorism, urged Nigerians and the military not to relent in the fight to end terrorism in the country.

Defence minister visits

The Minister of State for Defence, Dr Bello Matawalle, visited victims of the accidental bombing by the Nigerian Army in Agabi Local Government Area of Kaduna State.

Matawalle, alongside the Permanent Secretary in the ministry, Dr Ibrahim Kana, led a high-level delegation to visit and express the Federal Government's condolences to the victims, people and government of the state.

This is contained in a statement in Abuja on Wednesday by Mr Henshaw Ogubike, Director, Press and Public Relations of the ministry.

The minister, while condemning the unfortunate incident, said in spite of what had happened, the fight against insurgency and terrorism would continue.

According to him, the unfortunate incident will not deter the government from the fight against terrorism.

CNG faults DHQ

The Coalition of Northern Groups has condemned the bombing of the Tudun Biri community in the Igabi Local Government of Kaduna State, which has reportedly led to the death of over 100 persons.

The group also faulted the statement by the Defence Headquarters on Tuesday, that the casualties had resulted from its inability to distinguish between civilians and terrorist targets, adding that the army was shifting blame, rather than taking responsibility.

The National Coordinator of the CNG, stated this on Wednesday in a statement obtained by our correspondent, where he stated that the DHQ's argument that the terrorists mingled with civilians did not justify the killing of civilians, which he noted was a violation of International Humanitarian Law.

"The DHQ's argument that terrorists often mix with civilians is not a valid justification for the loss of innocent lives. The indiscriminate bombing of a community, regardless of the presence of terrorists, is a clear violation of international humanitarian law.

Furthermore, the DHQ's claim that the Army's unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) detachment observed the movement of terrorists in the area is insufficient to justify the loss of civilian lives. The use of UAVs should enhance the military's ability to gather intelligence and accurately identify targets, thereby reducing the risk of civilian casualties.

However, it is evident that this was not the case in the Kaduna state incident. The failure to distinguish between civilians and terrorists is shameful and questions the effectiveness and professionalism of the Nigerian Army", he said.

The group also alleged that the indifference of the government to make any arrest, despite the death toll, raised concerns "of a wider agenda to decimate the northern numerical superiority".

It called on the Federal Government to improve the counterterrorism unit of the military and provide adequate compensation for the victims and their families.

"This indifference by the federal government when it involves the North has further heightened the concerns that these killings are part of a wider agenda to decimate the northern numerical superiority.

The current incident of bombing lives out of more than a hundred people in Northern Nigeria without a single arrest made by the federal government raises questions about the disparities in response if similar incidents were to occur in Southern Nigeria.

The CNG demands adequate compensation for the victims of the Kaduna killings not only as a means of providing financial support to the affected families but also as a gesture of acknowledgment and empathy.