



Policeman killed as gunmen attack Shaibu, Okpebholo's convoy

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Former Edo State Deputy Governor, Philip Shaibu

By Adeyinka Adedipe

The court-reinstated Deputy Governor of Edo State, Philip Shaibu, returned to Benin, the state capital, alongside the governorship candidate of the All Progressives Congress in the September 21 election in the state, Senator Monday Okpebholo, to a rousing welcome at the airport on Thursday.

The joy was, however, short-lived as Insp Okon, a police officer attached to the governorship candidate, was killed after gunmen attacked the convoy of Okpebholo and Shaibu on leaving the airport.

Shaibu, who was impeached on April 8 by the state House of Assembly, was reinstated on Wednesday, July 17, after Justice J. K. Omotosho of an Abuja High Court ruled that he was unjustly impeached.

Both Shaibu and Okpebholo arrived at the Benin Airport around 2 pm to the rousing welcome of supporters.



Airport staff told The PUNCH that the way police officers acted around Shaibu gave a sign that something terrible would happen.

“When the plane landed, the way the police officers acted around Shaibu showed that something bad was going to happen.

“I saw the policeman who was killed. He was outside the VIP lounge waiting for Shaibu’s arrival. I didn’t know that he would lose his life,” he said.

When the convoy left the airport, gunmen shot at the motorcade, leading to the death of the policeman and injury to two others.

An eyewitness who identified himself as John said, “The incident occurred just after 2 pm when Okpebholo and several others, including the deputy governor, Philip Shaibu, arrived aboard a chartered private jet.

“Unknown gunmen in a Sienna vehicle at the exit gate opened fire at the convoy of Okpebholo and Shaibu. There were reprisal gunshots by armed security details attached to the APC candidate and deputy governor.

“It took the intervention of the Mobile Squad of the Nigeria Police to bring the situation under control. Several officers continued shooting to disperse the attackers as they fled in the Toyota Sienna bus.”

Speaking on the attack, Okpebholo’s aide, Godswill Inegbe, fingered a prominent former member of the APC as the mastermind of the attack.

He said, “This (Thursday) afternoon, the motorcade of Senator Monday Okpebholo, the APC governorship candidate, was brutally attacked by members of Edo State Security Network led by a former prominent member of the APC.

“During the unprovoked brutal attack, three mobile policemen attached to the security detail of Senator Okpebholo were injured with bullet wounds, while one of the policemen had been declared dead.”

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He said Okpebholo and other members of his entourage were receiving treatment at undisclosed hospitals in Benin.

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Also, a close associate of Shaibu, Sunny Okomayin, said the police officer lost his life when the convoy was attacked by some thugs.

He said Shaibu’s supporters were at the airport to welcome him peacefully, only for the gunmen to open fire on the convoy as it exited the airport.

“Shaibu cannot be blamed for the fracas. His supporters came to the airport to receive him after Wednesday’s judgment. He was attacked alongside Okpebholo as soon as he exited the airport. The narrative being pushed by the government is false,” he added.

The government, however, blamed Shaibu for the incident, saying he was unleashing mayhem on private citizens in the guise of enforcing a judgment reinstating him in office.

A statement signed by the Commissioner for Communication and Orientation, Chris Nehikhare, said: “The Edo State government has observed the level of wanton destruction perpetrated by thugs and elements working in connivance with former Deputy Governor of the state, Philip Shaibu, in the guise of purportedly enforcing a judgment reinstating him in office.

“Shaibu led thugs through the Airport Road axis of Benin City, attacking innocent citizens and unleashing mayhem on private citizens who are going about their lawful businesses.

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“The state government, through this statement, is warning Shaibu to desist from this turn to violence in the pretence that he is enforcing a judgment.

“He is reminded that he is not above the law and is liable for the wanton destruction perpetrated by him and his co-travellers.”

The statement added that Shaibu’s violent tendencies were well documented, adding that he had been warned at different times by respected figures of society, including the revered Benin monarch, to shun violence.

“We want to reiterate that Shaibu will face the consequences of violence that he has resorted to in pursuit of his aim to return to the Edo State Government House, even when he is aware that a stay of execution of the judgment has been filed.

“We enjoin the general public to be calm and go about their lawful businesses as the government will continue to deploy the instrumentality of the state to restore and maintain law and order in the state in the face of undue provocation,” the statement noted

When contacted, the spokesperson of the Edo State Police Command, Chidi Nwabuzor, said the police were investigating the matter.

Meanwhile, over 100 armed men of the Edo State Security Network took over the Deputy Governor's office (outside the Government House) on Osadebe Avenue, Benin, Edo State.

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At the office on Thursday, the stern-looking men of the state-owned security outfit took charge with no one allowed to go in or out of the office.

It was, however, not clear whether Marvellous Omobayo, who was appointed by Governor Godwin Obaseki to take over from Shaibu, was in the office at the time the ESSN men took over or not.

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