

Biafra: 5 shot dead celebrating Kanu's release

• HURIWA seeks N100m for IPOB leader

From Jeff Amechi
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FIVE members of Indigenous Peoples of Biafra (IPOB) were yesterday allegedly shot dead by securitymen in Onitsha, Anambra State while celebrating the release by an Abuja High Court of Radio Biafra Director, their leader, Mr. Nnamdi Kanu. The IPOB members who were jubilating at the Bridge Head in Onitsha clashed with the security operatives resulting in the death of five persons.

There was tension among motorists and commuters along the busy Niger Bridge area, Enugu/Onitsha Expressway over fear of possible blockage of the Bridge Head by the IPOB members.

The supporters, who on hearing about the court's favourable verdict on Kanu converged at the statue of the late Biafran leader, Dim Chukwuemeka Odumegwu-Ojukwu in a large procession from Bridge Head to the town when they were intercepted by the security operatives.

An eyewitness, who is also a trader at Bridge Head Market, Chibuike, said trouble started when the IPOB members were asked to stop their march towards the River Niger Bridge,

but the group insisted and continued, an action that led to the fracas and shootings.

He said the security agents shot sporadically probably to disperse the crowd. They might have been hit by stray bullets, he noted.

Another source said a soldier was among the casualties but could not confirm whether he died or not.

As at Press time, traders and artisans who transact business around the area had to shut their shops to avoid possible attack by the IPOB members or possible stray bullets.

When contacted, the Police Area Commander for Onitsha, Mr. Philip Ezekiel, told our reporter to call back later, saying there was emergency in the town.

Earlier in the day and after three months of incarceration by the Department of State Services (DSS), Justice Adeniyi Ademola of the Federal High Court sitting in Abuja released Kanu.

Ruling on a bail application filed by his lawyer, Mr. Vincent Egechukwu Obeta, Justice Ademola also set aside an order earlier granted the DSS to detain Kanu for 90 days to enable the security agency complete its investigation.

The judge said Kanu's continued detention after three

months without trial, violated section 158 of the Administration of Criminal Justice (ACJ) Act 2015 and section 35 of the 1999 Constitution.

He said there was no law that permits the DSS or any other security agency to detain any Nigerian beyond the period stipulated by the Constitution, when in fact, there was no intention to put the person on trial.

"From the available facts before the court, it is clear that the DSS either lacked enough materials to prosecute the applicant in court or yet to make up its mind on prosecution," he said.

The judge, however, frowned at Kanu's claim that Terrorism Prevention Act 2013 (Amended) was illegal, adding that the Act is a potent legislation to check terrorism.

A Chief Magistrate Court in Abuja had on Wednesday struck out a criminal charge against Kanu by the DSS. Chief Magistrate Shauibu Usman, in a ruling discontinued the trial of Kanu, following a motion to that effect filed by the prosecuting counsel, Mr. Moses Idakwo.

The fact of the case, according to DSS report was that the accused formed an unlawful society with the purpose of bringing into being a Republic of Biafra. He was alleged to

have proclaimed himself as the leader of the Republic of Biafra and established a radio Biafra.

Meanwhile, a pro-democracy group, Human Rights Writers Association of Nigeria (HURIWA) has applauded the unconditional and immediate release of the IPOB leader.

HURIWA said Justice Ademola should have awarded Kanu N100 million against DSS for detaining him for three months over his rights' violation.

"HURIWA has therefore, expressed conviction that the Federal High Court, Abuja division which freed Mr. Kanu, the political prisoner of conscience should have awarded nothing less than N100 million damages to be paid to the released detainee for the flagrant breach of his fundamental rights and for prolonged period of psychological and physical torture that the Department of State Services subjected him to in the past weeks," it said in a statement.

HURIWA through its National Coordinator, Comrade Emmanuel Onwubiko and the National Media Affairs Director, Miss Zainab Yusuf, commended the court for this courageous decision but noted that the DSS would have been heavily penalised for these abuses of the rights of a citizen.

Keji Ogun holds peace talks with Audu