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Drivers shut down Benin-Lagos highway

— 2nd June 2017

• Protest murder of colleagues

From Ighomuaye Lucky, Benin

drivers shut down Benin-Lagos Expressway, yesterday, to protest killing of a conductor with Young Shall Grow Motors by robbers and incessant robbery attacks on the ever-busy highway.

The drivers' protest left commuters stranded on the highway for several hours.

A witness, who gave his name as Ayinla, a driver with Complete Sports, said the robbers took over the road as early as 1:00 am and killed one person on the spot.

He said while the robbers were operating, calls were put across to the Nigeria Police for intervention but they did not show up.

The robbers, he added, after having a field day, left uninterrupted.

Ayinla further added that luxury bus drivers, aggrieved at the incessant robbery attacks on the road, especially at Okada Junction axis and the degree of responsiveness of the police to an emergency situation, decided to barricade the road, which led to protracted gridlock which lasted for several hours.

"The drivers said they will not leave the highway until federal and state governments address the issue of incessant robbery on the Benin-Lagos expressway.

"This whole thing started at about 1:00am. I have been on the road since then..." he said. Another witness, Mr. Johnson Saliu, a driver with Tribune Newspaper, who arrived Benin at about 1:50pm described the situation as horrific.

"It was tough. You can imagine somebody who has been on the road since 11:00am till now, it is not easy and the experience was terrible.

"More than three weeks since I have been plying that road, there is no day there has not been a robbery attack," he said. Another witness, who declined to be named added: "We left Onitsha at about 10:30pm, while we were on the way, armed robbers attacked us immediately after Benin, heading to Okada. We managed to escape but, we now decided to park somewhere because the shooting was too much. That was when we discovered that the conductor of the bus had been killed. The robbers also attacked several vehicles close to where we parked, including Ezenwata bus and some small buses and were shooting everywhere."

In his response to the development, Secretary to Edo State Government, Osaro Ogie, admitted receiving a report on the incident.

"We received this report about a traffic jam which occurred around Okada Junction, as a result of armed robbery incident. We got in touch with the director of the Department of State Service (DSS), Ibrahim Hiliu and the Commissioner of Police. We saw the thousands of stranded passengers and drivers.

"I received the report of robbery operations and I can assure you now that security agencies are going to increase their presence around here and across the state.

"We have the responsibility to make sure that our state is safe and everybody who passes here does that safely. We are going to ease security on all the major roads involving members of the communities, the army, police and others."

On his part, Edo commissioner of police, Haliru Gwandu said: "We got this information in the morning that there was total gridlock from Benin to Lagos and when I contacted our DPO and commanders, the report was that there was robbery attack at about 1:00am. Thankfully, the distress call was able to rescue all the passengers. However, hoodlums who came from the bush shot the windscreen of the bus, wounded the conductor who later died in the hospital.

"Apart from the conductor, others are hale and hearty. I will say kudos to my men who attended to the distress call.

"The command is battle-ready to ensure such hoodlums are brought to justice. We will apprehend them. Not only that, proactive strategy will be deployed. The aspect of visibility policing where the government promised to provide containers for the police, so that hoodlums will not take advantage of heavy rainfall."

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