

Luxury bus owners, drivers protest members' killing in Onitsha

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Jeff Amechi Agbodo, Onitsha

Members of Luxury Bus Owners Association of Nigeria (LBOAN), yesterday, took to the roads in Onitsha, Anambra State, to protest the killing of their members, with the latest victim being a conductor of Ifeanyichukwu Motors, who was killed along Benue-Nasarawa Highway, by suspected armed robbers in army uniform.

The protesters comprising bus owners, drivers and conductors of luxury buses, numbering about 100, carried leaves and placards with inscription such as, "Federal Government should provide security for us on the highway; Our business is about to close due to increasing attacks and killings of our drivers, conductors and passengers on highways; Stop killings of drivers, Enough is enough; Government, security agents should come to our aid before it is too late; and Luxury bus owners say no to killings of drivers, conductors and passengers", among others.

They marched from Upper Iweka through Izuchukwu Park and Northern Park to Lagos Park Onitsha and warned that after seven days, if the government fails to provide adequate security on the highways, especially along Benue-Nasarawa axis, they would bring vehicular movement and business activities to a halt, by blocking the highway with their buses.

They alleged to have lost over 20 lives between last year and this year, while over 50 persons have sustained various degrees of bullet wounds on the road.

The leaders of the group and the National Task Force Chairman of the Association Mr. Chigbo Emebo, and his South East counterpart, Mr. Uchenna Maduako, lamented the incessant attack on their buses, and wondered why the gunmen always attack them on check points with police and army uniforms. They said, within one week, they witnessed three robbery attacks, the latest on May 6, when the driver of Ifeanyichukwu Motors was stopped at checkpoint and gunmen on army uniform opened fire on them killing the assistant driver (conductor) on the spot.

"They are using police and army uniforms to rob our buses and kill our drivers and conductors as well as passengers. We have been managing, but, it is now getting out of hand. Especially this year, along Benue-Nasarawa Highway, they rob us on a daily basis. Many of our drivers have stopped the driving job because of the killings on the road; just yesterday, they shot and killed a conductor of Ifeanyichukwu Motors, three days ago they robbed and killed two passengers of FG Onyenwe Motors.

The federal government and security agents should do something from now till next week, and if they fail to provide adequate security, then, we will proceed on massive protest and block the entire roads.

"We cannot afford to lose where we are feeding our families. We are providing job for many people, because there is no luxury bus company that doesn't have about 200 workers, and you know what it means to sack such number of workers, what will be their fate? We are, also, contributing to the revenue base of the country, we pay taxes and levies, we pay for our plate numbers and licenses; after aviation, it is luxury buses in terms of revenue and services, so, government should provide adequate security on the highway,"Maduako said.

The luxury bus owners also alleged that Customs officers always delay their buses on the road "for unnecessary checks, which force the drivers to pass through black spots at late hours. They insisted that their busses don't carry contraband goods, but only carry clothes from Onitsha to the North, stressing that the incessant attack on the roads may force them to withdraw their busses from the highways.

Others who spoke on the matter include the Manager of Ifeanyichukwu Motors, Mr. Obinna Ihejirika, the South East Regional Manager of The Young Shall Grow Motors, Mr. Kenneth Obianodo, Chairman of Luxury Bus Managers Association, Anambra State chapter, Mr. Edwin Anierobi, Manager of Chi-boy Motors, Mr. Joseph Ajagu and Manger of FG Onyenwe, Aruna Ibrahim. They urged the federal government and security agents to beef up security along the highways to stop the armed robbers from using their uniforms to rob buses on the road

