

HOME / LIFELINE / HIGHWAY KIDNAPPERS ON THE PROWL



## Highway kidnappers on the prowl

•Victims narrate how Fulani groups abduct motorists for ransom in Ekiti, Edo, others

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**Vicious kidnappers seem to be desperate in their determination to spread their devilish mission across Nigeria. These days, kidnappers of the Fulani stock are on the prowl. When they strike, they leave behind sorrow, tears and blood.**

In continuation of their ungodly adventures, these criminals are spreading their tentacles to more parts of Nigeria. Innocent citizens are their easy prey. This unhealthy development has unsettled many residents, especially in the South West, where they have been holding sway, brazenly carrying out their onslaughts in recent times.

Following arrests, some of the kidnappers have narrated how they rape, kill and even drink the blood of their victims, sometimes after collecting ransom. They seem to have taken over the business of kidnapping for ransom, which, until a few years ago, was common with criminals from the Niger Delta, South-East and South-West.

These bandits have abducted people in Ekiti, Edo, Oyo, Ondo, Kogi, Enugu and other states, even in broad daylight. They ambush unsuspecting targets and whisk them away in a commando manner.

The kidnappers also target policemen and soldiers to collect their arms and uniforms needed for their operations. Many of them are notorious and kidnap for ransom. Some members of these gangs also rape and kill their victims even after collecting ransom from their families. Those released are left to live with emotional trauma.

**Unlike the typical herdsmen, these Fulani kidnappers are in possession of sophisticated firearms and ammunition.**

**Nigerians have repeatedly called on the security agencies to intensify their efforts in fishing out the Fulani marauders who are often misconstrued for herdsmen. They are also urging the different communities to cooperate with the security agents in fishing out the bandits who have been terrorising many areas and causing residents sleepless nights.**

**In the past few months, many travellers along the Itawure-Efon Alaaye-Erio-Aramoko axis in Ekiti State have been victims of Fulani kidnappers. On Saturday, April 28, a number of people travelling along the axis were dragged out of their vehicles and taken into the bush by the kidnappers. Among the victims was the financial secretary of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) in Ekiti State, Mr. Kayode Oni. It was believed that no fewer than 10 people were kidnapped that day. Some of them were senior citizens.**

**Recently, a man who escaped being kidnapped by the Fulani marauders in that axis narrated his narrow escape.**

**Hear him: "I was in Ado-Ekiti en route to Ikole Ekiti, I boarded an 18-seater commercial bus in Ikole around 1:15pm. The journey was smooth until the time the driver, who was popularly known as Bororo due to the reddish nature of his skin, bought fuel at Bovas Filling Station.**

**Suddenly, at 3:33pm, after a place called Ita-Ido, off Ido Ile-Ekiti, we heard gunshots that were reminiscent of a war zone. I saw about 10 of them in our front. Our driver wanted to make a detour, but we also saw about 10 behind. I was in the front seat by the driver. We encouraged him to stop, and he did."**

**He said five young Fulani men, some of them in military uniform, walked up to them. He recalled that the vehicle in their front tried to reverse, and the Fulani men sprayed the vehicle with bullets.**

**"The 18-seater bus coming behind us that belonged to YMCA, St. Paul Church, Ijesatedo/Isolo District, tried to make a detour, but the vehicle was sprayed with bullets, which hit many of the passengers. One person was confirmed dead immediately and many were injured.**

"I hid my polythene bag that contained my video camcorder, camera, two phones, some picture materials for the production of a magazine, write-ups and photographs, two ID cards, my flash drive and money under the seat.

"Five of the Fulani guys came to us and gesticulated to us to come out and lie down, which we did. One of them was shouting, 'kawo money!' The shooting was going on from the others.

They asked seven members of our group, including me, to march into the bush. Two of the Fulani were in the front, two behind and they ordered us around. I discovered that the one behind me was unsettled. Without his notice, I bolted, and shoved him aside. He raised the gun, but he did not shoot. I kept running.

"Five others joined the race. Then he started shooting. One boy was shot in the leg but we managed to drag him along. They did not pursue us but the shooting was as if it was trailing us. We ran far into the forest for about one hour. I busted out somewhere close to Itawure after about two hours in the bush. A woman quickly came for me; she gave me water to drink. It was then I knew my leg was bleeding. The woman applied something on it that stopped the bleeding instantly.

"I later saw a man whose sister was killed and his brother kidnapped. The Good Samaritan woman organised a bike for us, saying some soldiers were already at the scene.

"Back to the scene. We met some soldiers from Ado-Ekiti and some from Itawure, some road safety officers, about five vehicles, our 18-seater commercial bus, the church's 18-seater bus that was sprayed with bullets and which had blood stains. We also saw other vehicles that had been 'redesigned' with bullets.

"There was one Toyota Highlander. The child of the owner was scheduled to wed the following day. The man was kidnapped, and they left the wife. I checked the bus that I boarded, but my bag was gone from where I hid it with all the content.

"With the way they handled the weapons, I can say that these people are nothing but armed robbers, kidnappers and terrorists. They are not herdsman. They were well trained. They are Fulani from their physical outlook and from the way they speak. Some of them were in military uniforms and aged maybe 20 years."

Similarly, in April, a Fulani man, identified as Murtala Umaru, confessed to have made over N100 million through kidnapping in Edo and the neighbouring states. He made the confession when he was paraded by the Edo State Police Command.

The Edo State Police Commissioner, Babatunde Kokumo, described Umaru as a kidnapper who disguised as a herdsman. It was revealed that the man has been in and out of prison. He had also kidnapped a prison official in Benin who identified the him.

Umaru was arrested bearing an AK-47 rifle, breech number KO340119, and 10 rounds of 7.62mm ammunition. The suspect confessed that he began kidnapping four years ago in Okene, Kogi State, and had participated in several other kidnappings across Edo.

He admitted to owning some cattle and that his gang had 10 AK-47 rifles with which they carry out kidnapping. He also confessed to be conniving with a certain wealthy man whom they fondly called Chief in one community, alleging that the man was the one that always gave the gang the identity of victims to abduct.

He confessed: "I am married. I stay in Auchi in Edo, but I was born in Lokoja in Kogi. I am into kidnapping. I have been into kidnapping for four years. I started in Lokoja. I have kidnapped over 50 persons. We kidnap them when they are travelling. There is one man that used to give us target. I collected N3 million in our last work.

"It is my oga that kills people. He has killed many people. We operate in Auchi, Ekpoma, Okene and other places."

In June 2017, a 22-year-old Fulani herdsman, Abubakar Mojumba, was arrested in Ibadan, Oyo State, by the police for allegedly kidnapping a 22-year-old woman, Sadiat Musa. The victim was abducted from her residence at Elewuro Village, Iganna, and taken to a thick forest in Iwore-Ile.

After robbing the family, he was said to have whisked the woman away and kept her in the forest, where he and his gang members raped her frequently for three days.

Mojumba was one of the 16 suspects paraded by the Oyo State Commissioner of Police, Mr. Abiodun Odude, at the state police headquarters, Eleyele, Ibadan, that particular day.

When the gang was busted, weapons such as guns, cutlasses, local bulletproof jacket, mobile phones, wristwatches, expended cartridges, cars, motorcycles and so on were recovered from him.

Odude said: "While abducting the victim, the hoodlums also stole her husband's motorcycle with which she was taken away. The suspect was later arrested with the assistance of the villagers while trying to negotiate a ransom with the victim's family members."

Mojumba, who spoke through an interpreter, confessed that he participated in the illegal operation because his gang members promised to give him a motorcycle.

Former Minister of Agriculture, Dr. Akinwumi Adesina, had raised the alarm in 2014 that Fulani herdsmen were facing a lot of pressure with the increase in population and desertification, adding that the increase in criminality had made livestock production a risky business. He called for regional solutions to the menace of rustling, adding that most of the cattle raiders had a relationship with others in neighbouring countries to perpetrate crime.

In the same vain, former President Goodluck Jonathan had, at a function in June 2014, declared that Fulani men were raiding communities and kidnapping innocent Nigerians.

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