

# Ekiti killings: Controversy trails deaths of 3

• *Residents raise concerns, as Army discovers corpse in forest*

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Controversy has continued to trail the alleged killing of three persons in the Efon, Erinmo and Aramoko axis of the road leading to Osun State from Ekiti State. Recently, three persons allegedly lost their lives to attacks by gunmen in that axis.

They were an Ise-Ekiti born Seye Olugboji, former staff of the state Civil Service Commission, a yet-to be identified woman, who was an assistant lecturer at the Afe Babalola University, Ado-Ekiti, (ABUAD) and another yet-to-be identified lady who went to Ekiti State University, Ado-Ekiti, to get her exams clearance. She was on her way back when she was allegedly killed by the gunmen. The gunmen had attacked their victims in a vehicle on the highway.

Eyewitnesses told Daily Sun that the armed men accosted vehicles and robbed them and also shot arbitrarily at anyone inside the vehicles. They added that security agents on the road, especially those who mount road blocks in the area were overwhelmed by the sporadic shooting of the gunmen and could do little to help the situation.

The identity of the assailants has also been wrapped in controversy. Some alleged that the gunmen were armed robbers who have lately resumed heinous duty on the highway others alleged that they were armed herdsmen who not only attack farmlands and farmers but also rob on the highway.

The Erinmo, Efon, Erik and Aramoko axis of the highway is a stretch of about 10 kilometers on the Ekiti/ Osun major road. It is a zigzag and has about four security check points. First of the check points manned by the police is usually at the last road breaker/bump created to control speed by motorists. It is at the point of leaving Erinmo for Efon and Ita Awure on entering Ekiti State. The next is the military check point in Ita Awuro shortly after the Efon junction. Two others spread along the Erio and Aramoko axis.

The axis has become a security threat due to incessant attacks and killings by gunmen. Olayinka Dada, claimed to be a regular user of the highway: "The security threat on Efon-Itawure-Aramoko Road must be taken seriously. In April, we were lucky to miss death by the whiskers after Itawure. A crew from Broadcasting Corporation of Ekiti State (BESES), had its vehicle sprayed with bullets. The soldiers there and a police contingent came to our rescue. A staff from BSES can bear me witness. There is the need to comb the bushes around that area and flush out these miscreants."

Another road user, Wunmi Ojo, said: "The armed men are operating between Erinmo and Efon. Just yesterday (Tuesday, last week), a friend from Efon told me that the criminals are operating between Efon and Aramoko. Whoever knows that route will know that Erinmo is before Efon from Ilesa/Ijebu-Jesa axis while from Efon to Aramoko, you have Itawure, Erio and then Aramoko.

"On that route, there is a military check point. A young man whose photograph appeared in the Facebook about three days ago on his way to Lagos was said to have been killed by the criminals between Erio and Efon. Whatever it is, our security agencies should know that there is already a serious security challenge in that axis and they must wake up to their responsibilities to tackle it before it gets out of hand. Killing people for the fun of it calls for serious concern."

Ajayi Oladele is resident in Efon: "The one I am an eye witness to was on Friday, May 25. It happened between Erinmo and Efon, I have pictures I shared on the social media. They do not lie. There have been reports on other locations across Ekiti, that do not make the Erinmon/Efon axis less true.

"Military check point is in Itawure, but the criminals are operating between Erinmo and Efon. Those villagers if properly grilled, must be in the know. Most of the times, if not all of the times, the boys after operation ran into the bushes which are their farm yards. Proper intelligence gathering will reveal their hideouts and routes. They do not come into the red sports in any vehicle, yet they move their loots."

Residents and road users could not also agree on the identity of the gunmen. While some alleged that they are armed robbers on rampage in the area, others argued that they are herdsmen who have stepped up their game by taking to daylight robbery on the highway.

Sadiat Aluko advised anyone coming to Ekiti from Osun or Oyo states to avoid the Erinmo to Ita awure and Efon axis: "I want to inform anybody coming to Ekiti from Lagos, Ibadan, Osogbo and others or going out of Ekiti or have any course to pass through Ekiti, not to pass through Efon. There have been killings and kidnappings between Efon and Aramoko since May 25. They should pass through Akure instead.

"The gunmen are not armed robbers but herdsmen. They do not ask or collect any dime from their victims. A friend told me his husband's friend was killed in the axis on May 25. When they went to collect his corpse a few days later, they met another set of dead people on the road who were allegedly just killed. Again, we heard the news of another friend, a colleague's wife also killed on that road.

"According to eyewitness, she was driving with her two kids. They shot her. It was one of ABUAD staff members who saw her by the roadside and started calling other staff members. The woman has been buried. This is so painful. We urge everyone to be prayerful and be careful and warn their loved ones to be careful on this road."

But another resident said: "My submission is that, the criminals are not herdsmen, they are armed robbers. Police should maintain proper surveillance on that road, not just to keep raiding travelers but proper policing and intelligence gathering as well. Those boys live among us, they are not ghosts."

The state Police Public Relations Officer (PPRO), DSP Ikechukwu Caleb, said: "Yes I can confirm that there were some killings on that axis but we are yet to get the details of the attacks. We will get back when we have been fully briefed. Meanwhile, we are deploying more security agents to forestall such tragedy in the area."

But the PPRO later issued another statement: "The attention of the police command has been drawn to recent messages being circulated in the social media that Erio, Efon, Alaaye Road is not safe to travel advising commuters and members of the public to stay off that axis, claiming that heavily armed Book Haram and Fulani herdsmen have taken over the road, terrorising innocent citizens indiscriminately.

"The Ekiti State Police Command urges members of the public to consider the content of the messages as misleading aimed at causing anxiety in the minds of Ekiti citizens and other roads users and therefore, should be disregarded.

"It is important to mention here that combined team of 33PMF, Federal SARS, Safer Highway, Operation Flush and state Intelligence Bureau (Surveillance) have been stationed on Erio/Eron/ Alaaye Road and its environs to ensure that lives and properties are protected.

"The Commissioner of Police, Bello Ahmed, enjoins the good people of the state to confirm sources of their information before circulating same to the police and other security agencies."