

► How they abducted over 10 victims, killing 6

## Ngozi Uwujare

**The Imo State Police Command in the last one week put a group of kidnappers out of business when they bust a gang responsible for the abduction of over 10 persons, six of who died while being held hostage.**

According to Imo State Commissioner of Police, Rabiuladodo, a combined team of operatives of Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) and Anti-Kidnaping Squad had tracked one of the most wanted kingpins in Imo state, Chijioke Ekiti, 35, to his hideout in Orodo, Mbatoli Local Government Area, on November 20, 2019. While he was shot dead in the ensued gunfight, the rest of his gang, led by Chijioke Nwankwo, was arrested two days later, on November 22, during a botched kidnap/robbery operation.

Their confessions and their record of conviction indicated the suspects are a bunch of deadly criminals that had put the state under siege in the past few years.

### Imo's busiest kidnap gang

According to Superintendent of Police Linus Nwalwu, Commander of the Anti-kidnapping Squad, confessions by the arrested suspects provided the Police authority with facts and figure to reconstruct some of the crimes committed by the gang in Imo State.

“On September 2, 2019, they kidnapped Ndukwu Patience, from Ogwa, Mbaitoli LGA, and collected millions of naira as ransom. The next day, September 3, Ikenna Onugwa, 31 and Chima, 28, were kidnapped by the gang and held hostage for five days before they were released after their families paid N2million,” Nwalwu affirmed.

The gang subsequently went on a kidnap spree: kidnapping Dr Chris of Kris Lab, Umukehi, Okigwe Road, Orji, Owerri North LGA, for N 3million on September 18; Angela Madumere of Ngugu, Ikeduru LGA on October 3; Mrs Margret Hul, a barrister, who travelling from Abuja to the Federal University of Technology, Owerri (FUTO) was abducted at Akabo in Ikeduru LGA, on October 13 and Nnenna Ibeto, 54, of Liopec Filling Station, Orji roundabout, Owerri North LGA, who went missing on October 17. They also claimed responsibility for the October 10 abduction of a barrister, Ifeanyi Bindel Dike, at Egbu in Owerri North LGA, for which they collected N3million ransom.

In November, their victims included Ofurum Kyniah and Chinedu Alameme at Naze Timber, Shade Market Road, Off Egbu Road in Owerri North LGA from whom they collected N900,000 from their bank accounts.

Their reign of terror came to an end in a failed kidnap operation at Awka where they had operated with assault rifles and two Beretta pistols, using a red Jetta car and a motorcycle.

## **An all ex-con gang**

All the six suspects in police net, identified as Chijioke Nwankwo, 25, Chinedu Joseph, 39, Ndubusi Anyawu, 22, Ebere Uzoma, 38, Tochi Igwe, 24 and Christian Chukwuemeka, 30, are ex-convicts who had served a minimum of four years in Owerri prison before their release in 2017 and 2018. They had quickly re-grouped and formed a new gang, even while members of their old gang are still languishing in Owerri Prison awaiting trials at the Imo State High Court, Owerri.

*Saturday Sun* Spoke with Chijioke Nwankwo, the lieutenant of the slain ringleader, Chijioke Ekiti. Nwankwo, the only son of a businesswoman mother grew up in Aba where he had his primary to secondary education at D-Nans schools but dropped out of the University of Jos in 2012 where he was studying Geology, due to, he claimed, the death of his father.

“It was my friend who introduced me to kidnapping. He taught me how to kidnap victims and keep them in the bush. I was with him and witnessed how victims’ relatives paid millions of naira as ransoms of which I received a share of the money,” he said.

The native of Amani in Obingwa Local Government Area of Abia State admitted to having kidnapped over 10 victims. “I took them to the forest where we collected millions of naira from the relatives of the victims,” he stated. “Ransoms were paid before we released the victims and in most cases, the victims were in our captivity for seven to 10 days, depending on when they paid the ransom.”

Between Chijioke Nwankwo and his slain boss, Chijioke Ekiti, they were responsible for no less than 15 kidnappings across Imo, Abia and Rivers state. Ekiti met his doom in a shootout with police when he was cornered in his den while Nwankwo and the rest of the gang were caught red-handed in a kidnap operation and subsequently led detectives to their hideout where, in his words, “victims we kept for waiting for [their] ransom,” were rescued.

A wayward son who blamed greed and bad company for his predicament, Nwankwo avowed that “My mother didn’t know that I am into kidnapping.”

He said: “I deceived her to believe that I was doing drugs which she insisted I should stop.”

Other suspects, Uche Uwaidu and Ndubusi Anyawu, narrated how they ended up in crime again after serving a jail term. According to them, following their arrest in 2014 and their four-year stay in Owerri Prison, they were released into the waiting arms of Chijioke Ekiti.

“He recruited us into a kidnap gang. We were about 10 released from Owerri Prison,” confirmed Anyanwu who further claimed, “We were the kidnapers that terrorized Imo State, kidnapping people all over the place and collecting millions of naira ransom.”

Tochi Igwe, another of the suspects, further averred that they were originally members of the crime syndicate of the vicious kidnap and robbery kingpin, Henry Chibueze, popularly known as Vampire, who was killed in 2017.

One of their victims, Uche Obi, summed up his experience at their hands as a “terrible ordeal.”

He said: “The kidnapers didn’t pity me; they at first demanded a ransom of N10million, but my relatives were only able to pay one million naira. I spent six days in their custody before I was released.”

Obi expressed joy at the death of their leader and the arrest of the rest of the gang. Beside their confessions, detectives recovered N800, 000 from the suspects as well as two pump-action, double-barrel gun. “The suspects will soon be charged to court,” Commissioner of Police Ladodo asserted.