

Customs armoured vehicles rot away, as smugglers kill officers in Ogun, Lagos

By **Steve Agbota**

Officers of the Nigeria Customs Service (NCS) are regularly being killed by dare devil smugglers, as the Armoured Personnel Carriers (APCs), procured by the Service have been abandoned across various commands.

The immediate past Comptroller General of NCS, Abdulahi Dikko, had in 2014 procured the APCs for Custom officers in Lagos and Ogun to combat smuggling. But, since 2015, the APCs have been abandoned while smugglers are having a field day killing, maiming and wounding officers.

For instance, in April 2018, a custom officer, Rasheed Abdulsalam, attached to the Federal Operations Unit (FOU), Zone A, Lagos was kidnapped after a fierce battle with smugglers.

Some of his colleagues also sustained various degree of injuries in the bloody anti-smuggling operation that occurred around Gateway Hotel, Ota, Ogun State.

Abdulsalam, till date has not been found as sources in the unit said he has been killed by the smugglers that kidnapped him.

Also, in January, 2019, smugglers killed another Custom officer, Hamisu Sani and

injured an inspector, Tijani Michael, during an ambush at Asero community in Abeokuta, Ogun State.

The operatives attached to the Ogun Area Command were on a routine anti-smuggling patrol in an attempt to secure eight vehicles loaded with smuggled rice and kept in Asero community.

Another FOU operative, Yakubu Shuaibu, was also shot dead by suspected smugglers in Ogun State in April 2019.

The victim, an Assistant Superintendent of Customs, was killed at Akinrun village, Oja - Odan axis in Yewa North Local Government Area. The smugglers, who ambushed the

operatives who were on patrol, also injured one of them, identified as Joseph.

However, stakeholders have raised the alarm over the number of Custom officers killed by smugglers in the last four years.

They, however, wondered why the Service would allow APC rot away while smugglers are killing Custom officers.

According to Sylvester Nnamdi, a clearing agent at the Apapa port, he queried why the Customs CG would allow the APC and allow officers face ill-equipped smugglers.

"The Custom CG should be held responsible for the death of the officers. We should ask him why the APCs are not working. Is it because they are procured by his predecessor? Or is it because they can't maintain it? We need answers," he said.

He stated further that the death of officers recorded while combating smugglers would have reduced if the APCs are put into effective use.

Reacting to the development, National Public Relations Officer of NCS, Joseph Attah, told Daily Sun that Customs do not have any abandoned armoured vehicles in any part of the country or not put into use. He maintained that Customs have been going on patrol with Toyota Hilux buses across the country.

"I'm not saying we do not have armoured vehicles in Customs. We have but we are using them. And again, i don't think there is any security outfit that one will go and ask them details about their armaments, and they will disclose the details to you. To be frank, we are making use of the armoured vehicles in our possession."