



## How Angry Mob Reduced Gummi to Rubbles

By Imam Imam, 09.04.2007

Gummi, the headquarters of Gummi local government area of Zamfara State woke up to a shocking reality on Tuesday August 28, 2007. A day earlier, four suspected armed robbery suspects were burnt to death while in police cell and the resultant mayhem that followed left 74 other residents in police net with more than half of the town running away from the law enforcement agencies.

Situated along Zamfara/Sokoto border, Gummi is one of the oldest towns in Zamfara State and has produced scholars of repute who have contributed immensely to the development of their state and the country at large. Among such persons were the late internationally-renown Islamic scholar Sheikh Abubakar Mahmud Gummi, the Chief Judge of the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Justice Lawal Gummi among others. Its peaceful state however got shattered on Monday August 27; few days after the Zamfara State Commissioner of Police described the town as an example in community police efforts.

What triggered the barbaric action from the residents of the town has left many baffled, considering the fact that among the 74 persons arrested, some are held in high esteem in the town and its environs. According to eyewitness account, the town has, in the past three months, suffered constant armed robbery attacks and in most cases, police provided little or no help in curbing the activities of the men of the underworld.

Reports indicate that residents have lost valuables ranging from cash household items like electronics, jewelries and in some cases; Fulani herdsman report loss of animals.

"We have never seen that kind of situation. You hardly stay for two days without a report of armed robbery. Sometimes it gets worse because if they could not find what they were looking for, they rape women and kill the men. We had to resort to offering of special prayers for God to intervene since the police have proved ineffective to our plight.

"Despite our efforts to organise vigilante groups to tackle the situation, most of the robbers come here with sophisticated weapons so there was no way we could have confronted them," a tearful Usman Shehu told THISDAY in Gummi.

According to him, it was in that state of fear that reports came to town that men of Nigeria Police Force on patrol have apprehended four suspected armed robbers on the outskirts of the town. He said on hearing the reports, some residents sought to have audience with Police authorities to plead with them not to release the suspects on bail.

"It was normal for Police to release those people on bail. Many people here held a protest to warn the police not to release the suspects. Some went to the Police Station to press their point. However, along the line, some youths hijacked the rally and demanded that the police release the suspects to them. On turning their request down, the youths set the station ablaze and in the process killed the four suspected robbers," Shehu added.

Another resident who simply identified himself as Abubakar said he was at the scene of the mayhem, and admitted that the youths knew very well that the suspects were inside the building. "We heard shouts of ataimake mu, meaning 'help us' in Hausa. Some of the elders in the rally attempted to halt the burning but it was too late. The police have firmly shut the doors and there was no way any one could enter. When it became clear that the fire will raze the whole building, every one ran away, leaving the suspects inside the building. Many people were remorseful but it was too late."

THISDAY checks however confirmed that there was no love lost between the police and residents of the town. In many instances, youths have openly threatened men and officers of the police station in the town, largely because they view the police as extortionist who derive pleasure from victimising the people. According to Shehu, it was common for one to hear youths castigating the police and accuse them of releasing robbery suspects without charging them to court. "Many here felt it was a matter of time before the Police will release those suspects," he added.

Whatever the grouse of the residents though, setting the station ablaze with four people locked in it

was well beyond any measure of reasoning. The suspects were said to have shouted for help but no one was around to offer any. At the time the mob got to the station, seven policemen were on duty but could not halt the rampaging youths. The seven policemen, according to report locked the door leading to the station while running away in order to prevent anyone from gaining access to the building.

Unconfirmed reports indicate that the suspected robbers pleaded with the running policemen to set them free if they could not guarantee their safety but their pleas fell on deaf ears. The policemen ran for safety, leaving behind the suspects to be roasted in the inferno.

Afraid of the consequences of their action, residents flee from the town for fear of police reprisals after reinforcement of mobile policemen were sent from Gusau, the state capital. Police top shots, led by the AIG Zone 10, Sokoto, John Hamza Ahmadu and the Zamfara State Commissioner of Police Hadi Zarewa visited the scene to see for themselves.

Carcasses of animals killed by the rampaging youths littered all parts of the town, while the market and other public places were deserted. The few people seen around confirmed they were on their way out as they sought to run away from any further breakdown of law and order.

Their fears were hinged on historic reasons. Gummi town, despite its peaceful nature, has a history of violent confrontation with the police. Few years ago, a mobile policeman attached to the Gummi division was killed by rampaging youths protesting against alleged police harassment. The resultant police action saw a massive arrest of people some of who are still serving various jail terms in prisons across the country.

Speaking to reporters, Zarewa debunked claims that the police were at loggerheads with residents of the town. He said men and officers posted to the area have had a good working relationship; a situation he said necessitated his men's determination to tackle the rising wave of crime in the area.

"It was this effort that led to the arrest of the robbers in the first place. My men were up and doing. On receiving reports of robbery, officers went on patrol and it yielded fruits when the four suspects were arrested. Plans were underway to take them to court when this unfortunate incident happened. No one can accuse us of not doing much. No one should also take the laws into his hands.

"It was unfortunate because my men pleaded with the mob to allow due process in the matter. Most of them were youths who do nothing in town other than to forment trouble. I know of the existence of those youths. As a matter of fact, just a week before the incidence, I went for familiarisation tour to three local governments in the area where I told the local government sole administrators and the Emirs to look for ways to make those boys productive. Most of them were used as political thugs during the last elections so without anything doing, they are bound to cause trouble in the town.

"I have said it times without number that the security of the society is a collective responsibility. The police alone cannot provide security to all. If members of the society who are supposed to guide against breakdown of law and order take the laws into their hands, what do you expect? However, this is just a minor case when you consider the general security situation in the whole state. The good thing is that all the elders and leaders of thought in the community have condemned the action. That is a good way to start and I am confident it won't happen again.

"The situation is calm right now. You can go to Gummi and ascertain that for yourself. All necessary measures have been put in place to ensure the safety of lives and property. Despite the minor set back in burning down of the station, our activities have returned to full swing. I am calling on all law-abiding citizens to go about their normal endeavours without fear or favour. The police are there to protect them and we won't fail in that regard," CP Zarewa added.

He said the arrested persons have given useful information to the police and will soon be charged to court. He also did not rule out further arrests. On whether the cases will be transferred to Abuja for further action, Zarewa said he has not received any orders to that regard.

As things are presently, politicians from Gummi have been making frantic efforts to secure the release of the detainees, but so far, all entreaties have met brick wall from the police.

Meanwhile, unconfirmed reports indicate that the state government has offered to rebuild the burnt police station and also assist in recovering some of the items believed to have been looted by the rampaging youths. The government has also offered to buy new vehicles to the police to replace the ones burnt by the mob.