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Horror in Ibadan Illegal Detention Camps

02.28.2008

The recent police discovery of illegal detention centres in Ibadan, the capital of Oyo State in the name of learning and knowledge impartation, may have added to the burden of the pacesetter. **Tunde Sanni** writes

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Ibadan, the capital of Oyo State in the past few weeks has been courting media coverage not in terms of the fading political violence which for most part of the last dispensation engulfed the state. But this time, it is the discovery by the Police of several illegal detention centres in the state in the name of education and learning.

Interestingly, caught in the web of the illegal centres are Islamic clerics whose style of imparting knowledge on their pupils is the unorthodox style of chaining their legs and hands, a scene that reminds one of the olden sugar cane plantation where African slaves were made to work while being chained even on the mouths to bar them from eating from the sugarcane.

The sight of the victims as parade before newsmen by the Police cut the image of hostages in war-ravaged territory. The stench that oozed out of their bodies left a tell tale of anger and pity. There have been different stories on the centres either from the 'captives', their 'captors', the police and the parents of the 'captives'. One after the other, the captives narrated their ordeals in the hands of their alleged Islamic teachers.

The police basking in an historic 'discovery' gleefully told newsmen that the 'hostages' were inhumanly treated by their captors' and turned them to second-class citizens in their own country. Ironically both the operators of the centres and the families of the captives narrated similar stories. The parents admitted that their wayward children were voluntarily taken to the Islamic teachers for reformation, a statement the teachers corroborated.

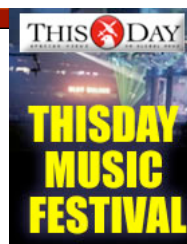
In one of the centres run by Mallam Abdul Ganiyyu Imoniyi, the state police chief, Assistant Inspector-General of Police (AIG) Udom Ekpoudom, while parading the Islamic teacher, said the illegal detention camp was discovered following a tip-off. He said his men stormed the detention camp located at Eleta, Ile Titun area of the state capital. According to the police boss: "My men on information stormed an illegal detention arena and discovered that a lot of Nigerians were being unlawfully detained and tortured. There were unconfirmed story that some of the inmates were even tortured to death and buried there. The inmates were chained so that they would not escape from the camp.

Although the operator of the detention centre and prime suspect, claimed to be running an Islamic school, his victims, who were brought to the Criminal Investigation Department (CID), Iyaganku said the centre was a dingy room on the outskirts of the city, where they were starved, beaten and sexually abused by the Moslem cleric and his cohorts.

The police boss alleged that ladies among the inmates of the home were sexually abused by the 'Alfas,' who shaved their pubic hair and ensured with the aid of spirituality that the girls would not menstruate as long as they remain in the 'house'. All the inmates were allegedly forced to drink some concoctions mixed with human waste, after which they become unconscious for one week while their captors abuse them sexually.

One of the inmates, Nurudeen Olawoyin, an HND holder from Yaba College of Technology, Lagos and former principal personnel assistant in the Federal Ministry of Education in Lagos, said he met the suspect in 2003 and had spent about three years at the centre. According to him, "My parents wanted me to be self employed; hence they invited me to Ibadan. I wanted to travel to London but my parent insisted that I should go to Saudi Arabia. This prompted my mother to take me to Alfa Imoniyi to teach me how to read Quoran very well. I was with him for three years until I suddenly fell sick. They took me to a hospital and when I recovered, they brought me back to the house but instead of taking me upstairs where the torture chambers are, they took me downstairs where the students learn Arabic." Nurudeen said he thereafter found a way of escape and ran to the Sanyo Police Station where he reported the matter to the police.

However in another narration, Nurudeen who claimed that he had been at the centre for six years said that he was tricked into the place by a woman who had swindled him of N350, 000 to facilitate a visa to Saudi Arabia. Unable to return the money back to him, the woman lured him to the centre for spiritual assistance. At the centre, she told Imoniyi that she brought her relative who had mental problems for reformation which made him an object of massive beating in order to exorcise the madness from him. He was



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thereafter chained on both legs and hands to frustrate his escape. His journey to freedom, however, started when he took ill and was subsequently moved to a private hospital from where he later seized the initiative to negotiate his freedom by running to the police to lodge a complaint.

Narrating her ordeal, 19 year-old female victim, Mulikat Bashir said the suspect tricked her parents to make her become a student in the Anakunmullahi Islamic Centre, where she had the most traumatic experience in her life. The young woman said she has no history of mental problem as claimed by the suspect and that other teachers in the school usually subjected her to rounds of sex at will.

Looking innocent and pathetic, Mulikat stated that she and other young girls were regularly beaten, poorly fed, had their pubic hair shaved and serially raped by Imoniyi's lieutenants who call them their wives. She said the concoction they were regularly forced to eat stopped their menstrual periods indefinitely and perhaps prevents them from getting pregnant.

Among the victims were teenage girls and boys, as well as undergraduates, who have spent between four to six years in the illegal camp. Pathetic - looking 13-year old Wasiu Azeez, a boy said they were daily beaten and made to eat the concoction, though they were also taught Arabic.

While the confessions of the inmates to the press were on, the prime suspect, Imoniyi insisted that the victims wanted to feed the police and the public through the media with false news about his operations in order to blackmail him. He described the center as a spiritual healing home, rehabilitation center and an Islamic training institute for mad people and wayward children respectively.

Looking innocent and unruffled, the 40-year old Islamic spiritualist claimed their parents, who either want healing for the mad or rehabilitation for the perishing child, brought the victims. He rejected claims that he feeds them poorly and with their own waste. He claimed that they bathe once in three days and that their parents bring food to them.

Imoniyi said that he established the camp 25 years ago and had trained and rehabilitated no fewer than 200 students. He added that most of the students under his care, who were freely brought to him by their parents, had cases of mental problems, which made it inevitable for him to handle them with iron hands to prevent them from escaping. He further claimed that most of the inmates in his care were dropouts and thugs before they were brought to him by their parents for prayers and rehabilitation.

Some of the parents of the inmates confirmed Imoniyi's claims. Sergeant Rasheed Adesina, a retired peace keeping soldier of the ECOMOG fame and father of Ibraheem, a 19-year old boy explained that he personally took his son to Imoniyi for rehabilitation as reports of truancy and sometimes sleeping at motor parks while he (the father) was away to Sierra Leone, necessitated his action. He even expressed satisfaction about his son now that he is of better behaviour.

As the dust of the discovery of Imoniyi centre was yet to settle, the police swooped on another centre where the operator, another Ibadan-based Islamic teacher, Alfa Ali Ademola, was arrested for allegedly torturing Biliaminu Bashiru one of his pupils to death. The 20-year-old victim, who was a trainee with the Alfa, was allegedly brought to him by his relatives on February 10 for Quranic education at his training centre located at Orogun area of Ibadan.

Recently, a similar centre was again discovered. Ekpoudom said "the experience at the scene was unbelievable and the treatment given to their captives was 90 per cent dehumanising. Six of the hostages who are females complained that they were subjected to series of sexual acts against their wishes. It was also discovered that illegal abortions were carried out on the pregnant inmates in the camp. It was a situation where human beings were shrunk to skeletal frame with severe burns and rashes. Grievous inhuman treatment usually resulted in multiple deaths of the inmates who were subsequently buried without any report to the police. The hostages in unison allegedly confessed that bodies of deceased inmates were usually eaten by their captors," he said.

The police chief added that the lid was blown off the activities of the prime suspect when one of the inmates escaped from the centre and tipped off the police. "Testimony reveals that the captives, whose ages range from ten to 60 years, were administered concoctions made from water with which dead inmates were washed.

"There were grievous inhuman treatment and torture usually resulting in multiple deaths of inmates who were subsequently buried without any report to the police. We understand that some big men visit some of these places to purchase human parts, but we are investigating to establish the claims," the police boss said.

About 93 victims were rescued by the police from Olore Arabic Centre in Sabo, Ojoo area of the city, while eleven Muslim clerics otherwise known as 'Alfas' were arrested by the police. Besides, there was an unconfirmed report that no fewer than 60 persons were allegedly tortured to death by the prime suspect and owner of the centre, Alfa Mohammed Olore and his cohorts in the last eight years when the Arabic school started.

Exhibits recovered from the suspects were three cars, N32, 000, three spades, concoctions, a jar of black soap and plastic container with reddish water allegedly drained from the corpses of the dead inmates. The victims, predictably, were said to have been taken to the center, mostly by their parents for rehabilitation from mental illness, drug abuse and waywardness; while some were there allegedly for spiritual cleansing and Quranic education.

They looked gaunt and unkempt, as they begged journalists and everybody on sight for money to buy food.

Their rashes-ravaged skin, laced with scars of lashes, was an apparent indication that the victims were kept under inhuman conditions and subjected to severe torture. One of the six females among them, 23-year-old Saminu Jafaru, told newsmen that she was subjected to sexual abuse,

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which once led to pregnancy.

Among the early callers at the SARS office was the Aare Musulumi of Yorubaland, Alhaji AbdulAzeez Arisekola-Alao and the immediate past Attorney General and Commissioner for Justice in Oyo State, Alhaji Adebayo Shittu. Arisekola offered to assist the police in feeding and accommodating the suspects until they are handed over to their relatives and parents.

The Islamic leader offer might not be unconnected with Ekpoudom distress call for people's support in the handling of the victims because his command is not that buoyant to take care of all the victims brought out of the illegal camp. Ekpoudom said Arisekola had chosen to house and feed the victims, as well as pay for their rehabilitation until they reunite with their families.

Expectedly, Olore, the prime suspect debunked claims by the victims saying he was only involved in the training of the students in Qu'ran as well as the treatment of mental cases particularly drug victims. The prime suspect, who is the proprietor of the Olore Arabic Centre, said the victims "only lied against me in order to implicate me before the police pointing out that he has been involved in the teaching of Arabic and rehabilitation of Indian hemp smokers in the last eight years. The allegations they were leveling against me are false. I did not beat anybody to death. All they are saying is just to implicate me. They are saying that just to paint me black".

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