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Kaduna Jailbreak: 10 Inmates Feared Killed

From Imam Imam in Kaduna, 04.21.2010

Some inmates at the Kaduna Convict Prisons in Kaduna State met their Waterloo yesterday as they attempted to escape from jail. About 10 of them were said to have been killed in the process.

The situation threw the Marafa Estate area of Kaduna town into pandemonium as security agents moved in to quell the riots from within the prison.

Bullet shells and used teargas canisters littered the entire area when reporters first visited the scene as early as 7 am. Information available to THISDAY indicate that the crisis started as early as 6 am in the morning when the inmates broke loose from the cells and set some parts of the prison ablaze.

They were also alleged to have dug holes from their cells in an attempt to escape.

One of the prison warders on duty when the incident occurred told THISDAY that the inmates attacked the warders and attempted to force their ways out of the building.

"Few minutes to six in the morning, we heard noise from within the yard and to our surprise, we saw the inmates in numbers moving towards the workshop and bringing out dangerous weapons, which they used to attack us. They came from the G-Line of the prisons, which is used in housing robbery suspects.

"The armed guards among us opened fire but were overpowered, they quickly ran outside, while some of us were told by the inmates to change into convict uniform, which we did. They set the admin building, record office and the workshop on fire. Some made for the walls and attempted to escape but were stopped by the guards who were firing from outside."

The source said some prisoners had earlier leaked the planned escape to the warders and asked them not to bring them out at 5 am for the early morning chores.

"We did n't bring them out at five today (yesterday) but by six, they broke the walls of their cells and moved into the yard," the source added.

Prison authorities have, however, denied the huge number of deaths allegedly recorded, saying only two inmates lost their lives in the fracas.

The Comptroller-General of Nigeria Prison Service, Mr. Olushola Ogundipe, blamed the crisis on congestion in the prison, which he said is over stretching the facilities and making the inmates uncomfortable.

Addressing journalists after inspecting the damage done, Ogundipe said the situation had been brought under control.

He said: "Awaiting trial and robbery convicts attempted to break in and escape from Kaduna Prisons. I want to say that the total number of inmates that we have that were opened out this morning was 797. Out of this 797, we have 539 awaiting trial and we have about 139 people awaiting execution, on the death row. So we had a lot of cases of people awaiting trial in the yard most especially robbery suspects.

"So the problem we had today (yesterday) came from the robbery suspects section. By 6:15 am this morning (yesterday), the doors were unlocked when the prisoners opened them and overpowered the guards, went straight into the yard and went straight to the workshop and brought out dangerous weapons, which they used in attacking everybody.

"In the process, buildings were burnt down by the inmates; the admin block and the workshop were also completely razed down. But I want to thank the Kaduna State Commissioner of Police and other security agents in Kaduna for their efforts in bringing the situation under control. This is what we call inter-agency cooperation; they were able to come to our aid to contain the situation. The riot was put down by the combined effort of the police, other security agents and the warders.

"In terms of casualty, inmates died while attempting to escape. If you go round the prison, you will see a hole where they dug and attempted to escape from it. Luckily, students from the training school cordoned off the place and there was no single escape. No prisoner escaped. Not a single prisoner escaped. But we lost two inmates and 39 were injured with various degrees of injuries.

"Some members of staff were also injured, with serious ones among them taken to the hospital. I also want to thank the Kaduna State Government, and to say that immediately the incident occurred, the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) came to our rescue, Kaduna State Government brought in doctors and you can see ambulances all over evacuating those who are injured to the hospital.

"The situation is now calm, and all inmates have been taken back to their cells and further investigation is being carried out on the remote and immediate causes of the incident.

"Capacity of Kaduna prison is 524, but this morning, we opened out 797 and out of this number, we have 539 awaiting trial. So congestion of the awaiting trial section is a big problem for us, and we all know the problem we are having with the judiciary, some courts are on strike, so that is what is exacerbating the problem."

When journalists inquired on reports that convicted Reverend King, who is on death row at the prison, was behind the crisis, Ogundipe said he could not say until investigation is carried out.

He said: "Reverend King is a condemned criminal. He is one of the inmates that are on death row. No matter whom you are, so far you are behind the walls (of the prison), you are to live by the rules and regulations of the prisons. I want to say that Rev King is still having his appeal in court and his paper, nothing (has) happened to it.

"As I earlier told you, we are still carrying out investigation on the remote and immediate causes of this incident so we have to wait for the outcome. Let me tell you one point, Rev King is a condemned convict and we have about 139 condemned convicts inside this prison.

When the condemned convicts' fence was broken, none of them came out, none of the condemned convicts joined in the crisis despite the fact that their cells were broken. These are people that were on the death row, they are still praying that may be the Governor will commute their sentences to life, they did not join the riot. It is only the awaiting trial and robbery suspects that carried out the riot."

On whether King has been moved out of the Kaduna prison to forestall any crisis, Ogundipe confirmed that some inmates were moved out last Saturday 'on a routine' transfer.

He added: "I cannot tell you where Rev King is, but I can tell you that he is still my inmate and he is hale and hearty.

Let me re-emphasise that Rev King is an inmate, and no inmate is beyond the rules and regulations of the Nigerian Prison Service. I can confirm to you that Rev King is safe and sound, and there is nothing wrong with him."

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