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Presidency, Experts Fault Presidential Committee Report on Chibok Abduction

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Chibok girls

- *As group bemoans FG's attitude to Kaduna killings*

By Chuks Okocha and John Shiklam

Two Presidency officials and some security experts at the weekend described the report of the presidential committee on the abduction of some schoolgirls from Chibok, in Borno State, as fundamentally flawed.

The presidential fact finding committee headed by Brigadier General Ibrahim Sabo (rtd) had been set up on May 2 by the federal government to investigate the circumstances surrounding the April 14 kidnapping of nearly 300 girls from Government Secondary School, Chibok, by the Islamic terrorist sect, Boko Haram. The committee submitted its report to the president, Dr. Goodluck Jonathan, on June 20, with Sabo confirming that 276 girls were abducted by the sect, while 57 escaped and 219 were still missing.

But officials of the presidency and security experts who spoke with THISDAY at the weekend on condition of anonymity described the 45-page report of the committee as lacking in analytical reasoning and depth required of an inquest of such nature.

This was as ethnic nationalities in the southern part of Kaduna State yesterday expressed their displeasure at the federal government's lacklustre attitude to the repeated bloody attacks on their communities by Fulani herdsmen. Their annoyance followed fresh attacks by the marauding Fulani on villages in Sanga Local Government Area of Kaduna State on Friday in which 40 people were killed.

"We have seen the vice president and the president rush to the scene of a bomb blast which killed 22 people in Abuja on Wednesday. But they have not issued even a statement concerning the 142 people that were killed in Bondong, Kaura Local Government Area of Kaduna State," Southern Kaduna Peoples Union stated in a release.

One of the experts who spoke on the Chibok committee report, a retired deputy director in the State Security Service, said whilst the committee explained that Government Secondary School, Chibok, was initially closed for security reasons, but was re-opened for the WAEC examinations because, it was located in "areas least affected by the activities of the insurgents," the committee, however, "failed to ask what is perhaps the most relevant question here, which is, what security arrangements did the Borno State government put in place to secure the school and its students."

He said, "It is worrisome that the committee did not bother to address this in its evaluation of events leading to the invasion of the Chibok school by Boko Haram insurgents, especially when it earlier noted in its report that 'The state government made adequate arrangements for security of examination materials and staff of WAEC, especially, in view of the undertaking given to the Federal Ministry of Education by the Borno State government that adequate security would be provided.'"

Both the Presidency officials and the security experts believed the blame for the security lapse that preceded the seizure of the girls should have been laid firmly at the Borno State government's door by the committee, instead of virtually adopting the position of the state government on the issue.

Another area that the analysts faulted was the committee's conclusion on the number of girls abducted on the night of April 14, when the insurgents attacked the School. They wondered how the committee ascertained that all 395 girls of the school were in the hostel on the night of the attack since WAEC had confirmed that there were candidates who had not shown up for any of the exams held before the attack.

"Who verified that 395 girls slept in the hostel?" the security expert asked, explaining that there were no wardens, principal, or staff in the school on the night of the attack.

He accused the committee of being engrossed in an arithmetic meant to arrive at a predetermined figure of 276 rather than doing a thorough work to ascertain the actual number of those kidnapped.

Another expert, who said he had looked through some of the findings of the committee, raised yet another poser. If, indeed, the students were made to believe that the insurgents, who disguised in military uniforms, were there to take them into safe custody, what motivated the 119 girls to escape while some 276 followed, since there was no apparent violence, according to eye witness accounts?

A presidency official added, "The committee also failed woefully to remove the cloud on how the insurgents evacuated such a huge number of girls at such an hour of the day. How many vehicles were commandeered and used? At what stage was the school burnt down? These are issues that ought to be addressed to give credibility to the report."

The experts also faulted the committee for its failure to visit chibok and hold thorough dialogue with the local community. "It was inconceivable that a committee, which had such a wide terms of reference, only sent two of its members to Chibok and those two only spent 30 minutes in the locus," one of the security analysts said.

He added, "This is a very major defect in its assignment and it raises lots of questions on the report eventually turned in.

Whoever prevented the committee from having direct interaction with leaders of the Chibok community has done a great disservice to the nation. The committee's report has, therefore, raised more questions and provided less answers. It has presented government with misleading information and figures that are apparently unreliable."

But at the weekend, the people of southern Kaduna State accused the federal government of showing no concern to their plight after raids by suspected Fulani herdsmen that have killed more than 200 people in Sanga Local Government Area in the last one week. "Yet the southern part of Kaduna State is the stronghold of the ruling Peoples Democratic Party," the people lamented in statement by their umbrella body. "This is an area that gives the PDP 100 percent support to bring them to power. We don't know what we have done to this government to deserve this type of negligence when our people are being slaughtered like animals."

SOKAPU said, "We are disappointed with the attitude of the federal government towards the massive killings that are going on in the southern part of Kaduna."

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