

#EndSARS: Seeking Ceasefire, Osinbajo Apologises, Promises Swift Reform Action

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'Dear Nigerians, I know that many of you are angry, and understandably so. We could've moved faster and for this we are sorry'

• Violence persists, 5 killed in Lagos, Benin, Akure

Our Correspondents

Vice President Yemi Osinbajo yesterday pleaded with EndSARS protesters to sheath their sword, promising that the federal government is working on a number of measures to revamp the police and end brutality by its personnel.

In a series of tweets on his verified Twitter handle late yesterday, Osinbajo admitted that far too many people had been brutalised by the police and that it was unacceptable, adding, "we must take responsibility for protecting young people, even sometimes from those who are paid to protect them."

The Vice President said he had been following the protesters who have been demanding an end to police brutality, and has had a number of discussions with key people in the administration which the protesters deserve to be informed about because "transparency, after all, is a key tenet of government."

Osinbajo said: "Dear Nigerians, I know that many of you are angry, and understandably so. We could've moved faster and for this we are sorry. I fully understand how many young people feel. Many feel that we have been too silent and have simply not done enough. These feelings of frustration are justified.

"We understand that you want to see action from us and I'm here to tell you that work is ongoing. I chaired a meeting of 36 state governors and the Minister of the FCT (NEC), where we resolved to set up judicial panels of inquiry so we can see justice served, and fast; the reason being that only state governors, by law, can set up judicial inquiries in their states. The hearings will be public.

"With Mr. President's approval, SARS has been completely disestablished, and none of its former members will feature in any police tactical units. I am sending my deepest condolences to the families of Jimoh Isiaq, and all those who have lost their lives at the hands of wayward police officers. To those injured, I wish a full and speedy recovery.

"We also understand that the issues that you're raising are bigger than just SARS. They're deep and systemic and we're undertaking comprehensive measures that will revamp the police by addressing issues of welfare, service conditions and training. We will continue to update and engage with you all on these action steps and the ones to come, in the spirit of transparency, so that you can hold us accountable. We are, after all, here to serve you and we owe you a duty to win back your trust.

Meanwhile, five people lost their lives at different locations yesterday as the #EndSARS protest entered the ninth day. The casualties were recorded in Edo, Lagos and Ondo states.

At least two persons died when hoodlums attacked the protesters at Ring Road, Benin.

The hoodlums, who stormed the venue of the protest, armed with machetes and other weapons unleashed mayhem, leaving other protesters scampering for safety.

Some individuals selling tickets at the Ring Road Motor Park in Benin were fingered for the security breach. Their attacks were attributed to their frustration over low patronage since the beginning of the protest, which has continued to keep passengers away from the motor park at the Edo State capital.

Edo State Governor, Godwin Obaseki, confirmed the killings without giving the exact number of casualties. He, however, said "lives" were lost.

In a series of tweets after the incident, the governor condemned the attack on #EndSARS protesters.

He said, "I have just learnt that hoodlums have attacked #ENDSARS protesters, who have conducted themselves peacefully in Benin City. I extend condolences to the families of those who lost their and wish others who were injured quick recovery."

Two Killed in Lagos

In a related development, the Lagos State Police Command yesterday announced the death of two persons in a road accident that occurred during an #EndSARS protest in the state.

The Command's Public Relations Officer, Olumuyiwa Adejobi, made this known in a statement.

He said one of the #EndSARS protesters, identified as Nike, had been arrested for driving recklessly and for allegedly killing two Nigerians at Ikola Road, Alagbado.

The PPRO noted that the bodies of the victims had been deposited at the morgue. Adejobi said, "Mrs Nike Lawal, was the driver of Toyota 4Runner SUV with REG. NO. GGE 346 BK that ran into a tricycle and killed the duo of Ojo Azeez, m, 27 years and Yusuf Sodja, m, 26 years, both of Command Road, Alagbado, Lagos State.

"Ojo and Sodja both in the tricycle died on the spot. The suspect, who intentionally removed the number plates on her SUV, shortly after the accident, had joined the protest at AIT junction, Alagbado, and started driving recklessly before the fatal accident.

Adejobi also said the command had arrested and commenced orderly room trial of the four policemen who were caught assaulting a young lady protester in a viral video at Surulere on Monday.

He said the policemen are Inspectors Bagou Micheal, Ekpoudom Etop, Nnamdi Makita and Akinyemi Benson.

"The policemen, who are attached to the Divisional Police Headquarters, Surulere, Lagos State, are cooling off in the cell while the orderly room trial continues. CP Odumosu has also ordered the arrest of the policeman who slapped an aged mother in another viral video at Iyun Street, Surulere, on the same day," he added.

Protesters attacked in Lekki

In Lagos, some hoodlums were said to have attacked protesters at the Lekki Toll Gate as they continued their protests.

The protesters alleged that they were attacked yesterday morning as a truck rammed into cars parked around the area.

Cars destroyed included a Range Rover and a Lexus jeep.

Yesterday's attack was another episode in the series of attacks on the protesters by some criminal elements in a desperate bid to halt the protests.

Notwithstanding the attack, protesters returned in the evening for a candlelight procession which was ongoing as at press time last night.

One Dies, Three Injured in Akure

In Akure, the Ondo State capital, one person was killed while three others were injured as a car rammed into EndSARS protesters yesterday.

The protesters had gathered in front of the Ondo Governor's office when a Toyota Camry marked LND 778 GL and two commercial motorcyclists rammed into the crowd.

One person was said to have died on the spot, while others were rushed to the hospital.

Protesters Block Abuja Airport Road

Meanwhile, campaigners against police brutality and oppression yesterday barricaded the Abuja International Airport Road.

The protesters took over the ever-busy Umar Musa Yar' Adua road in apparent defiance of the order issued on Thursday by the Federal Capital Territory Administration (FCTA) Security Committee that banned people from protesting on the streets as a precaution for the spread of COVID-19 among the FCT residents.

The activists, made up of a large army of youths, brandished several placards, marched through several Abuja streets like Area 1 and Area 3 in Garki, before fanning out towards the Airport Road, alighting at MKO Abiola National Stadium.

Afterwards, they blocked the Abuja City Gate, singing anti-government slogans and vowing to continue to protest until all the grouses are resolved by the authority.

Police provided security cover for the demonstrators while the protest raged.

The protest resulted into traffic chaos along that route with many commuters experiencing hardship.

In particular, it disrupted the flow of traffic from the city centre towards the Airport and its adjoining communities.

Commuters alighting from the Airport end had to divert to alternative routes like Galadimawa and Jabi to reach their destinations.

Protesters Shut Down Third Mainland Bridge, Hold Candle Procession

The Lagos Third Mainland Bridge, which is currently undergoing repair was not spared by the protesters as the Iyana Oworo section of the bridge was partially shut down yesterday

The protesters were said to have arrived at the bridge a few minutes to 06pm, leaving some passengers stranded.

Their activities were also felt at the Berger section of the Long Bridge linking Lagos-Ibadan Expressway, forcing some commuters to drive against traffic in their desperation to escape the scene of the protest.

Gridlock on Lagos-Ibadan Expressway

In the same fashion, protesters stormed the Magboro area of the Lagos-Ibadan Expressway to continue their demonstration against the disbanded SARS yesterday.

The protesters were seen carrying placards with different inscriptions as they blocked the expressway, causing gridlock.

Anambra: Police Open Fire on Protesters

Sounds of gunfire rented the air as protesters marched to the headquarters of SARS in Awkuzu, Anambra yesterday.

The protesters, who were led by Chinedu Okoli, highlife maestro better known as Flavour; Chibuzor Nelson Azubuike, a rapper better known as Phyno, Kingsley Okonkwo, singer better known as Kcee, were chanting "End SARS! End SARS!".

The massive crowd had converged on Awka, the state capital, from where they moved to the disbanded SARS office to demand the shutdown of the facility.

The Akwuzu SARS office, led by one James Nwafor, has been accused of gross misconduct, arbitrary arrests, torture and extra-judicial killings.

Protesters Storm Ekiti House of Assembly

The case was not different in Ekiti State where protesters under the auspices of #EndSARS movement yesterday stormed Ado Ekiti.

The #EndSARS protesters, who converged on the popular Fajuyi Park in the state capital as early as 8am, barricaded the major road thereby causing traffic gridlock at the busy area.

The state governor, Dr Kayode Fayemi who was on his way to the State House of Assembly to mark his second anniversary as governor was forced to stop and speak to the protesters.

Fayemi, while reiterating that the youths had genuine agitation for a holistic reform in the police, he appealed to them to continue their demonstration in a peaceful manner and to ensure it is not hijacked by hoodlums.

The protesters later stormed the House of Assembly where Governor Fayemi's address to the lawmakers was disrupted.

It took the intervention of the police for Fayemi and other dignitaries to be whisked out of the place unhurt, as the protesters became unruly.

Ugwuanyi Addresses Protesters

In Enugu State, Governor Ifeanyi Ugwuanyi yesterday addressed some protesters who visited him at the Government House, Enugu, to press further their demand for an end to police brutality in Nigeria.

Ugwuanyi, who described the protest as a solemn moment for the country, called for prayers and a minute silence for the departed souls of victims of extra-judicial killings in the country.

The governor commended the protesting youth for their peaceful conduct and urged them to remain law-abiding.

NHRC submits report on SARS to PSC

Meanwhile, the National Human Rights Commission has submitted the report of the Presidential Investigation Panel on SARS to the Chairman Police Service Commission, Musiliu Smith, for "immediate implementation".

The report was earlier submitted to the President Buhari in June 2019, but no action was taken on it.

The submission of the report to the PSC 16 months after it was handed over to Buhari for implementation was contained in a statement released yesterday by the NHRC's Assistant Director Public Affairs, Fatimah Mohammed.

The NHRC stated that the Executive Secretary of commission, Tony Ojukwu, while submitting the presidential panel's report to the PSC boss, "expressed confidence in the ability of the PSC to ensure an effective implementation of the report".

He noted that the panel called for and received 113 complaints on alleged human rights violations from across the country and 22 memoranda on suggestions on how to reform and restructure SARS and the Nigeria Police Force in general.

According to the statement, "the panel recommended 37 police officers for dismissal and 24 were recommended for prosecution."

Ojukwu was said to have submitted to Smith, "Volume 11 of the main report which

contains the recommendations targeted at bringing the needed reforms in the Police force”.

Twitter Raises Fist in Support of #EndSARS

There was a huge support for the EndSARS protest yesterday as an emoji, a raised clenched fist, draped in Green-White-Green colours of Nigeria’s flag was launched by Twitter, the leading social media platform.

The Chief Executive Officer of Twitter, Jack Dorsey, tweeted the #EndSARS hashtag with the new emoji yesterday morning, and is widely used.

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