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IN BID TO FREE SCHOOLGIRLS, MATAWALLE TAPS MASTERMIND OF KANKARA ABDUCTION

"We have the capacity to deploy massive force against the bandits in the villages where they operate, but our limitation is the fear of heavy casualties of innocent villagers and hostages who might be used as human shields by the bandits."

Daudawa, who hails from Zurmi Local Government Area of Zamfara State, had nine days ago accepted the Matawalle amnesty with some of his gang members. They also submitted their arms and ammunition, with a promise to support Matawalle's push against banditry.

Sources said Daudawa is familiar with the bandits that abducted the Jangebe schoolgirls and that Matawalle called him yesterday with a plea to speak to the abductors to drop their guns and free the girls without any ransom.

Another source said Matawalle, after enlisting Daudawa, for the push to free the Jangebe schoolgirls, also called another notorious bandit, Zakao Buhari, to join the pressure on the Jangebe kidnappers.

Zakao Buhari, the son of dreaded bandit, Tsoho Buhari, notoriously known as 'Buharin Daji' had also repented and surrendered his weapons to the Zamfara State Government last Thursday.

"The Zamfara governor is asking for the help of these repentant bandits because they can easily influence the abductors of the schoolgirls to release them without bloodshed. One thing you can't take away is that Daudawa and Zakao Buhari know most of these bandits. They will be very useful in the push to free these girls peacefully. This is why Matawalle engaged them," said the source.

Meanwhile, the military, the Nigerian Police Force, men of the Department of State Security and other security agencies early yesterday morning commenced a manhunt for the bandits that abducted the Jangebe schoolgirls.

The abductors, in their hundreds, invaded the town early yesterday morning, went straight to the school and took away the girls.

A statement issued yesterday by the Force Headquarters confirmed the joint operation to rescue the abductees.

It said in the statement: "Operatives of the Nigeria Police commenced a coordinated search and rescue operation, involving the deployment of both

ground and aerial assets, aimed at locating and rescuing the students of Government Girls Secondary School, Jangebe.

"To ensure the success of the ongoing operation, the Inspector-General of Police, Mohammed Adamu, has ordered the immediate deployment of two operational surveillance helicopters to Zamfara State."

The statement said the deployment was in addition to the personnel of Operation Puff Adder II earlier deployed to the state to support efforts by the Command to combat banditry, kidnapping and other related crimes.

It said the IG, while condemning the barbaric and callous abduction of the innocent female students, assured that the police and other security forces would not relent until the abducted students are successfully rescued and reunited with their families.

"The joint rescue operation is being carried out by the police, the military and other members of the law enforcement community with support from the state government and other stakeholders."

"The IGP has called for calm and enjoins members of the public, particularly the people of Zamfara State not to hesitate in availing the police and the law enforcement community with useful information that can assist in the rescue of the abducted school girls," the statement said.

How the Girls Were Abducted

A staff of Government Girls Secondary School, Jangebe, who begged for anonymity, said the bandits arrived early yesterday with Hilux vehicles and motorcycles and forcefully evacuated the students.

He narrated that some of the bandits were in military uniforms and pretended to be security personnel, then later broke into the students' hostels and abducted more than 300 students.

"When they came into the school, we thought they were security personnel but to our utmost fear and dismay, they started putting the girls into Hilux vehicles and motorcycles then drove out of the school," the source said, adding that the bandits were in the school for several hours without any challenge due to absence of security agents.

Also, a resident who gave his name as Haliru Jangebe said the local vigilantes had tried to repel the invaders but were overpowered.

"The bandits were too many and they all seemed to be carrying heavy arms as we heard gunshots from all parts of the town and when the shots stopped, we heard that the students had been taken away."

A parent of one of the girls, who gave his name as Malam Lawal Jangebe said, "I nearly fainted when I heard about the abduction of the students, including my daughter."

The gunmen attacked some houses on their way to the school, Abubakar Jangebe, a resident said.

"They took some of the girls and went into the bush. We don't know what is happening right now."

The Commissioner of Police, Zamfara State Command, Abutu Yaro said they have information that the girls were moved to a neighbouring forest, and they are being cautious in their tracing.

Parents Storm School

Parents of the abducted girls yesterday morning stormed the school in search of their children.

The parents were initially stopped from entering the school but they got angry and started pulling down the doors in protest.

"Initially, the school authorities prevented them from going with the remaining students but they got angry and began to pull down doors and windows of the buildings in the school and the authorities had to yield to their demands," a teacher of the school was quoted to have said.

One of the teachers at the school disclosed that parents of the students who escaped the abduction, came as early as 5am to take away their daughters, adding that some mothers of the abducted girls slumped at the school premises.

"When the gunmen laid siege, they attacked the soldiers stationed in the community before they gained entry into the school. Some people told us that they stationed vehicles at the outskirts of the school. Security operatives and the local vigilante groups are trailing the gunmen and dozens of other residents have volunteered to take part in the search."

Buhari Warns Bandits

Buhari, in his statement,

sent out a strong warning to the bandits and their sponsors, declaring that his administration would not succumb to blackmail by bandits who target innocent school students in the expectations of huge ransom payments.

According to the President, "no criminal group can be too strong to be defeated by the government," adding, "the only thing standing between our security forces and the bandits are the rules of engagement."

He stressed; "Our primary objective is to get the hostages safe, alive and unharmed. A hostage crisis is a complex situation that requires maximum patience in order to protect the victims from physical harm or even brutal death at the hands of their captors."

"They should not entertain any illusions that they are more powerful than the government. They shouldn't mistake our restraint for the humanitarian goals of protecting innocent lives as a weakness or a sign of fear or irresolution."

The President appealed to state governments to review their policy of rewarding bandits with money and vehicles, warning that the policy might boomerang disastrously.

He also advised states and local governments to be more proactive by improving security around schools and their surroundings.

Northern Governors Condemn Abduction

The Northern Governors Forum has condemned the abduction of the school girls. In a statement in Jos yesterday, Chairman of the Forum and Governor of Plateau State, Simon Lalong, described the development as "embarrassing and unacceptable."

According to him, strong measures must be taken to put an end to the trend before it escalates into a monster that will consume educational pursuit and national aspirations.

Lalong added that the development, which is coming on the heels of the abduction of school children in Kagara, Niger State, which is still being addressed, should be of serious concern to all Nigerians.

Atiku: States Must be Empowered to Control Internal

THEKWEAZU: COVID-19 TRIGGERED RAPID INVESTMENT IN NIGERIA'S HEALTH SECURITY

much as possible. "They have shown incredible leadership and support, pooling their support and bringing life to the phrase - 'Stronger Together'."

Four Million Vaccines Expected from COVAX Next Week

The World Health

Security

Former vice president Atiku Abubakar expressed sadness over the kidnap of the schoolgirls.

In a statement yesterday, he said: "My heart is very heavy over the abduction of our young daughters from Government Girls Secondary School, Jangebe, Zamfara State."

"I have had a phone conversation with the Governor of Zamfara, H.E Bello Matawalle, and I am informed that his government is doing everything in its power to secure the release of the abducted students."

"I have previously made recommendations on how our beloved nation can defeat enemies of the state and win the war on terror, and I stand by those suggestions. However, right now, all hands must be on deck to support the Zamfara State government in securing the release of those abducted."

"The Federal Government cannot expect the states to provide security of life and property in their domain, without giving them control over internal security. This is now a necessity."

"Thus, I call on the National and State Assemblies to begin the process of constitutional and legal reforms that will make this a reality. The Legislature must take the lead, as it seems the Executive may not be able to provide the needed leadership on this issue."

"My heart goes out to the families of the abducted children, and my right hand of fellowship is extended to Governor Matawalle, to help in any way possible."

PDP Condemns Abduction

The Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) also condemned the abduction of the girls and tasked President Buhari to wake up from slumber and deal decisively with the escalated scourge.

The party lamented that the terrifying spate of abduction and acts of terrorism in the country validate concerns that the All Progressives Congress (APC) and its administration have become bereft of solutions to the escalated insecurity under their watch.

The National Publicity Secretary of the PDP, Kola Ologbondiyan said: "Our party demands immediate full scale investigation into this particular abduction, given some worrisome

reports going round in the public space."

The Zamfara abduction occurred some eight days after gunmen kidnapped dozens of students and workers of Government Science College in Kagara, Niger State.

Bandits had also last year kidnapped over 300 schoolboys from Government Science Secondary School in Kankara, Katsina State.

Aside from Kankara and Kagara, non-state actors had also abducted hundreds of secondary school girls from Chibok in Borno State, and Dapchi in Yobe State.

Bandits Kill 35 in Maru LG

Meanwhile, no fewer than 35 persons have reportedly been killed after suspected bandits attacked Sabuwar Tunga village, Dankurmi district in Maru Local Government Area of Zamfara State on Thursday night.

According to reports, the gunmen stormed the community on motorbikes and unleashed terror on the defenceless residents.

A resident of the community said the attack was well-planned and coordinated.

He said the gunmen after attacking the village carted away livestock and escaped into the forest.

"We have recovered over 35 bodies after the attack and many more residents have not been accounted for. They came at midnight and opened fire on the village, shooting anyone on sight and burning houses," the source said.

UN: Schoolgirls Must Be Released Unconditionally

The United Nations yesterday described the abduction of Jangebe schoolgirls by bandits as a "heinous violation of human rights."

The global body also said the abducted schoolgirls must be released "immediately and unconditionally."

UN Secretary-General, António Guterres, made this known in a statement.

"I am appalled by the abduction of more than 300 girls during an attack on a secondary school in Nigeria today. Attacks on schools are a heinous violation of human rights. The girls must be released to their families immediately and unconditionally," he tweeted.

established in every state in Nigeria, a digital surveillance system (SORMAS) has been implemented across all states and new standard treatment centres are being established across the country.

"Almost every state in Nigeria now has a public health emergency operations centre, integrating a call centre, and other resources required to manage this outbreak. A national

stockpile of response commodities has been established and new oxygen plants built."

He added that "no other outbreak has led to this level of widespread investment in our health security."

Ihekweazu also counted the gains of collaboration and coordination, saying, "perhaps, one of the biggest strengths of Nigeria's response to this pandemic

has come from the power of coordination, collaboration, and solidarity across federal and state governments, across the public and private sectors, between the United Nations agencies and non-governmental organisations, and most critically across the government and its citizens."

Acknowledging the role of the private sector, Ihekweazu said: "One of

Organisation yesterday disclosed that Nigeria would get its first four million doses of coronavirus vaccines next week from the global COVAX programme for poor and middle-income countries.

Walter Kazadi Mulombo, head of WHO's mission in Nigeria, told a briefing by video link that Nigeria was expecting 14 million doses in total.