

IPOB Commander, Six Others Killed in Joint Military, Police Operation

● Army officer, 3 policemen lost ● Group confirms killing, says Imo governor will pay dearly ● Troops decimate 21 terrorists in Yobe

Tobi Sontyl and Kingsley Nweze in Abuja

A tactical team of the Nigeria Police, Nigerian Army, and Department of State Services (DSS), in a joint operation early Saturday morning, stormed the operational headquarters of the Eastern Security Network (ESN), the military wing of the proscribed Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB), in Awomama, Oru East Local Government Area of Imo State, killing seven members of the group.

The Army said Ikonso Commander, who was said to be the commander of the IPOB military, was among the seven killed during an exchange of gunfire between government forces and ESN fighters.

An army officer and three policemen also died in the operation.

In a swift reaction to the attack, IPOB confirmed the killing of one of its commanders, but disputed the security agents' claim that ESN operational headquarters was stormed. It said Ikonso was ambushed.

IPOB issued a stern warning to Imo State Governor Hope Uzodinma, saying he "will pay dearly" for the killing of one of its commanders.

In a related development, the military authorities said troops killed 21 terrorists in Geidam, Yobe State.

A statement by the Nigerian Army, signed by the Army spokesman, Brigadier-General Mohammed Yerima, said the operation in Imo State was launched in the early hours of Saturday following an intelligence report on the location of IPOB's operational headquarters and the movement of the overall commander, popularly known as Ikonso Commander. It said the Intelligence Response Team (IRT) of the Police and DSS team, along with troops of 82 Division of the Nigerian Army, had been on the trail of the group since the attacks on the Imo State Police Command headquarters and the Owerri Correctional Centre on April 5.

The statement alleged that Ikonso Commander was the mastermind of the attacks, in addition to multiple attacks in the South-east and South-south.

The statement said, "The joint intelligence team had earlier interviewed several arrested IPOB/ESN terrorists in connection with the April 5 attacks and they all confessed that Ikonso Commander who was named as Vice President by their leader, Nnamdi Kanu, and was the one that mobilised men and resources as well as ordered and orchestrated the attacks on Owerri."

"They equally revealed that Ikonso was responsible for many other attacks on police stations across the two geopolitical zones."

It said the intelligence team later "tracked the IPOB/ESN top leader to his exact location in Awomama village where he (Ikonso) and his co-commanders were hibernating and plotting dastardly acts against the Nigerian state."

"On noticing the presence of the joint operations team,

IPOB/ESN terrorists brought heavy volume of fire on the raiding team who swiftly responded and overwhelmed them with superior fire power that neutralised Ikonso and six of his top Commanders."

"Sadly however, a Second Lieutenant and three IRT operatives paid the supreme price in the fire fight that ensued. The four officers who fought gallantly have already been evacuated to a military facility in Owerri."

The army statement said three AK 47 rifles, a Toyota Sienna van, and several other items of value, including drugs suspected to be psychotropic substances, were recovered and were being processed by the intelligence team to assist in further investigations and operations in the area.

The statement added, "The joint security team is already dominating the general area while preparations for further operations are in top gear. The neutralised Ikonso Commander had in several occasions posed for photographs with the fugitive

leader of IPOB, Nnamdi Kanu."

The Army said the Chief of Army Staff, Lt General Ibrahim Attahiru, commended the troops, the Police IRT, and DSS operatives for making the operation a success.

"The Nigerian Army along with other security agencies will sustain intelligence-based kinetic operations in the South-east and South-south until the regions are free of terrorist activities," the statement said.

IPOB had denied being behind the attacks in Imo State.

In a statement by its spokesperson, Emma Powerful, on Saturday, IPOB said, "The killing of the heroic innocent Biafrans protecting our communities and towns from Fulani terrorists herdsman masquerading as cattle herders in cold blood is very painful."

The Supreme Court Administrator of Imo State, Hope Uzodinma, and all those who had a hand in this wickedness will pay dearly.

"Hope Uzodinma and his cowardly Nigerian security agencies that cannot confront Fulani terrorists but only flex

their muscles when they see Biafra agitators. For murdering Ikonso, the ESN (Eastern Security Network) unit commander in cold blood, Uzodinma has stirred the hornet nest! He should get ready for a sting."

"Uzodinma decided to kill Ikonso because he refused his offer to head Ebubeagu ghost security outfit formed by South-east governors. Uzodinma has tried but without success to lure ESN operatives into Ebubeagu. He had made irresistible offers to them, which were turned down, hence his resorting to elimination of these patriotic heroes who vowed never to betray Biafra."

"Hope Uzodinma sent a lot of emissaries to beg Ikonso and other ESN officers to join Ebubeagu security outfit. So, because of their refusal to betray Biafra agitation and our leader Mazi Nnamdi Kanu, the hopeless governor mobilised joint security forces to attack them today."

"Contrary to claims by the cowardly security forces who

flee from terrorists but kill innocent citizens, they were not able to penetrate into the camp of Eastern Security Network. They only ambushed Ikonso but we promise them hell for this cowardly act!"

"Hope Uzodinma has murdered sleep, so he should be ready to stay awake! Fulani terrorists pretending to be cattle sellers in Enugu destroyed police vans and attacked government officials on lawful duty with AK-47 but no army, police or DSS attacked them till now. But ESN operatives defending our communities against the terrorists are being hunted like games every day. The world has kept quiet over this atrocity until we begin our own madness."

Meanwhile, troops of Operation Lafiya Dole (OPLD) currently conducting Operation Tura Takalibango inflicted heavy casualty on Boko Haram/Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) terrorists in Geidam, the headquarters of Geidam Local Government Area of Yobe State.

Gunmen kill Nine Persons in Nasarawa Farming Community

Igbawase Ukumba in Lafia

Gunmen suspected to be Fulani herdsmen, in the early hours of yesterday, attacked Ajimaka, a Tiv farming community in Doma Local Government Area of Nasarawa State, killing nine persons, while several others were reported missing.

The gunmen, who were said to be carrying sophisticated weapons, invaded the community at about 2:00am, shooting sporadically.

It was gathered that most of the victims were majorly women and children scampering to safety during

the invasion of the area by the suspected Fulani herdsmen.

An eyewitness gave names of some of the persons killed during the attack to include Tsekai Chiatyo (m), Kwaghdo Tsekai (f), Sewuese Tsekai (f), Bobo Chiatyo (m), Aondoseer Fidelis (m), Aboyi Aduku (m) and Mwuese Aseer (m).

President of Tiv Development Association (TIDA) in Nasarawa State, Comrade Peter Ahemba, confirmed the incident while speaking with journalists in Lafia and described the attack as both unprovoked and unfortunate.

He regretted that the attacks

on the Tiv people of the state, particularly, those living at the border areas between Benue and Nasarawa States have become a recurring decimal despite efforts by the Nasarawa State Governor, Abdullahi Sule and his Benue State counterpart, Samuel Ortom, to ensure lasting peace. "Each time the Fulani herdsmen have issues relating to implementation of the anti-open grazing law by the Benue State government, they come and attack our (Tiv) people in Nasarawa State."

"We are indigenous Tiv people of Nasarawa State. We are peace-loving people

and the Fulani herdsmen must stop attacking our people for things they know nothing about," he said.

He lamented that the ugly development has led to the displacement of thousands of Tiv farmers in the area, regretting that the incident was happening at a critical time farmers were set to commence the current farming season.

While acknowledging efforts by the Nasarawa State government to ensure peace and security at the border areas of the state, the TIDA President appealed to the state government to direct

deployment of security operatives to the trouble area to forestall further breakdown of law and order.

He called on the Tiv people to remain calm and avoid taking laws into their hands despite the unprovoked attack as the state government was taking measures to restore normalcy.

When the Nasarawa State Police Command was contacted over the killings, the Police Public Relations Officer of the command, ASP Nansel Ramhan, said the command was yet to receive any report on any occurrence of such from the area.