

Compensate Families of Those You Killed or Face Legal Action, Masari Tells Customs

● *As lawmaker accuses agency of killing 25 people in Katsina*

Francis Sardauna in Katsina

The Katsina State Governor, Aminu Bello Masari, on Monday, directed the Nigerian Customs Service to compensate families of those killed and injured by its operatives in Jibia Local Government Area or face legal action by the state government.

He also accused the Nigerian Customs Service under the leadership of Col. Hameed Ibrahim Ali (rtd) of working against the people of Katsina State, particularly those at the border communities in the state.

In the same vein, the Member representing Jibia-Kaita federal constituency, Hon. Sada Soli, has accused the operatives of the Customs Service of killing 25 persons in Jibia Local Government Area of the state.

Masari, who gave the directive, when he received the Service Zonal Coordinator, Zone 'B' Kaduna, Assistant Controller General (ACG), Uba Mohammed, urged the service to arrest and prosecute its officers and driver involved in the Jibia incident.

A THISDAY report had it that

operatives of the NCS, while pursuing suspected smugglers in Jibia Local Government, on Aug 9, 2021, lost control and killed 10 persons and injured 20 others.

The governor called on the Nigerian Customs Services to liaise with other security agencies to identify and raid shops, where contraband were stored rather than reckless shootings and killings of innocent citizens of the state.

"There was a time you (Customs) were shooting sporadically and shouting right here inside the Katsina city, when bandits are there killing people. But you are also busy killing people, because of bags of rice on motorcycles, unfortunately.

"We are not condoling smuggling in any form but then you have criminalised people living within the border communities of Nigeria. You don't even care. Life means nothing to you, because in the end you are going to declare in the federation account amount collected by the Customs.

"Today, if you are taking pure water from Katsina to Jibia you will pass not less than 28 checking points. Those 28 check points, they

are not check points but toll-gates. You are making life miserable for people you suppose to serve.

"You are pursuing somebody on a motorcycle with five bags of rice as if you are pursuing a bandit. Look, for me, you have to compensate these people. Secondly, you must prosecute the driver and the officer, who directed him.

"We will not accept anything short of this. We are ready to test the legal system that gave you right to kill right inside the town. There are only two things that will stop us from testing; you compensate those lives that you killed and prosecute the driver and the officer who is directing to pursue recklessly," he said.

On his part, Soli, who corroborated the governor's position, said, "We are not happy with the conduct of the operatives of the Nigerian Customs Service. In the course of three years, we have the records, the customs killed 25 people in Jibia, and this is the first time the killing is generating this kind of interest.

"There are 2,000 villages on 156 borders from 21 states in this country but we did not experience

this kind of behaviour like the way we are experiencing in Katsina".

Dr. Bashir Ruwan-Godiya, who spoke on behalf of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) in Katsina, said the CSOs in the state would no longer condone the attitude of the customs operatives in the state, declaring that, enough was enough.

He said: "There is no point whatsoever that somebody who is trained and given the opportunity to protect lives, will turn into a killer of lives because of rice.

"Your visit here is not enough and will not bring anything to us, unless we see action, change and difference in what is going on in these border communities.

The ACG Mohammed, said the service was not unmindful of its paramilitary responsibility, which was essentially to protect lives and described the incident as unfortunate.

"As part of the visit, the Controller-General, Rtd Col. Hamid Ali, has mandated us to interact with communities, leaders, the bereaved families and the victims of the accident with a view to report our findings," he said.