

## El-Zakzaky : 7 feared dead as Shi'ites, security agents clash

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**ABUJA** — No fewer than seven persons were feared dead yesterday, while 21 others sustained injuries, as members of the Islamic Movement of Nigeria, IMN, engaged security operatives in a bloody clash in Abuja.

The clash followed demands by the sect members for release of their leader, Sheikh Ibrahim El-Zakzaky, by the Federal Government.



Face off between Police and Members of Islamic Movement of Nigeria (El-Zakzaky) in Abuja yesterday .Photo by Gbemiga Olamikan

The Police Commissioner of the Federal Capital Territory, FCT, command had last Friday banned the group from further protests in the city, after a rally at the popular Unity Fountain, where they had a sit-out.

**Vanguard** gathered that members of the religious sect, in defiance of the Police order, yesterday insisted on staging their peaceful protest around the Fountain, saying the ban was a breach of their constitutional rights.

The large crowd of protesters included adult males and females, as well as under-aged members who came from various parts of the country.

Business activities around the Unity Fountain and 3-Arms Zone were grounded in what started as a peaceful demonstration but later turned violent when security forces tried to stop their march on the streets.

Eye witnesses said that the IMN members were ready for a showdown with the security agents as they defied police tear-gas and hot water in their march towards the Eagle Square.

### **Police fire tear gas, water cannons, ammunition**

In the melee that ensued, it was gathered that security operatives drafted to enforce the Police order deployed teargas, water cannons and live ammunition on the protesters, which resulted in casualties.

Secretary of the Academic Forum of IMN, Mallam Abdullahi Musa said members of the sect who sustained gunshot injuries were rushed to a private facility where they were being treated by health workers and fellow members of the movement.



Face off between Police and Members of Islamic Movement of Nigeria (El-Zakzaky) in Abuja yesterday .Photo by Gbemiga Olamikan

He also said that several corpses of their members who died at the scene of the clash were carried away by the Police to unknown location.

“We came out to continue our peaceful protest to demand for the release of our leader, Sheikh El-Zakzaky, but true to the promise of the Police Commissioner, we met the Unity Fountain cordoned off by about 200 armed Police officers, backed by soldiers.

“We engaged them in talks. We asked them to let us hold our daily sit-out because it is our right to do so. But they refused. So, we quickly drafted a petition and headed to the headquarters of the Human Rights Commission to register our grievances. The security operatives launched an attack on us, using tear-gas and water cannons to disperse us and stop us from proceeding with our plans.

“We attempted to resist them with stones. But then, they opened fire on some of our members, killing many and injuring scores. They also carried away the remains of quite a lot of our members and even sat on them as they drove to an unknown location.

“On our part, we took 28 to a facility where some health workers among us will give them medical attention. Unfortunately, we lost seven to profuse bleeding from the gunshot injuries they sustained,” Musa said.

Effort by **Vanguard** to visit the facility where the injured were being treated was truncated by some members of the sect who expressed concern over the safety and security of those in critical condition.

## **We'll continue our protests — Shi'ites**

On what to expect from IMN following the clash, Mallam Musa insisted that the sect will not stop calling for the release of El-Zakzaky, vowing that the protests will continue today.

“What happened today (yesterday) in Abuja was purely a show of shame by the Police, who are hell bent on forcibly stopping our legitimate campaign for government to obey the orders of its courts by freeing Sheikh El-Zakzaky.

“This is a legitimate struggle. We have a right to protest and assemble peacefully. This we have done in Abuja and all other places peacefully for almost two and half years now.

“We have stepped up the campaign in Abuja since the last 100 days (and it is noteworthy that it had been peaceful) with daily sit-outs at the Unity Fountain and processions.

“Last week, the authorities used combat-ready policemen to forcibly stop the sit-out. They also arbitrarily arrested Deji, one of the conveners of the sit-out. He was clearly told that ‘the government is uncomfortable with the ‘Free Zakzaky campaign’ going on in Abuja. He was told to stop it.

“We will not back down. We will continue to protest the unlawful detention of our leader. If the government likes, it should kill all of us. We are going to take to the streets of Abuja tomorrow (today) to continue the call for Sheikh Zakzaky’s freedom.” he said.

Vanguard also learned that the co-convener of ‘OurMumuDonDo’ movement, Deji Adeyanju, was re-arrested during the clash.

He was earlier arrested for alleged incitement to civil disobedience, following his comments on El-Zakzaky last Friday but was released same day, sequel to the intervention of maverick entertainer, Charles Oputa, popularly known as Charly Boy.

### **Violent attack on Shiites is condemnable — *Falana***

Reacting to the clash, the group’s lawyer and human rights activist, Mr. Femi Falana, said: “The violent attack unleashed on the Shi’ites this afternoon by a combined team of armed soldiers, police and state security service personnel is totally unacceptable in a democratic society.

“It is highly condemnable as it was uncalled for. In order to press for the release of their detained leader, Sheik Ibrahim El-Zakzaky and his wife the Shi’ites have staged peaceful protests in Abuja since last week.

“This morning (yesterday), security forces attacked the peaceful rally, killed some of the protesters and injured others in a barbaric attack in a desperate bid to stop the Shi’ites from further exposing the lawlessness of the Federal Government.

“In the process, the security forces breached the fundamental rights of the protesters to life, freedom from torture, freedom of assembly and freedom of expression. Meanwhile, the Federal Government has not adduced any justifiable reason why it has continued to incarcerate the El-Zakzakys in utter contempt of the Federal High Court.

“If the Federal Government is genuinely desirous to stop the protests it has to comply with the valid and subsisting judgment of the Federal High Court forthwith.

“It is pertinent to point out that while it is completely illegal to deploy soldiers to shoot and kill protesters, the Nigeria Police Force is required by law to provide adequate security for any group of Nigerians demonstrating for or against the government.

“Accordingly, the violent disruption of the peaceful rally of the Shi’ites was carried out by security forces outside the ambit of the law. Those who carried out the violent disruption of the peaceful rally ought to be prosecuted for culpable homicide.”

### **Nobody was killed — FCT Police boss**

In a telephone chat, the Commissioner of Police, FCT, CP Abubakar Bello, disclosed to **Vanguard** that 115 rioters, including thugs, Shi’ites sympathizers and violent members of the Islamic Movement of Nigeria were arrested after a confrontation with the police who tried to stop them from creating havoc and disturbing the peace and security of the FCT.



Face off between Police and Members of Islamic Movement of Nigeria (El-Zakzaky) in Abuja yesterday .Photo by Gbemiga Olamikan

The CP told Vanguard that contrary to rumours making the rounds, no member of the group was killed during the encounter. He confirmed that several police officers and operatives of other sister security agencies were injured by the Shi’ites, many of who were armed with daggers, arrows and other dangerous weapons.

The Police Commissioner insisted that but for the Police intervention, the group, along with many of its rented thugs, would have caused significant mayhem and damage to residents and peace-loving people of the FCT.

### **Military not involved — Defence HQ**

Reacting to the development yesterday, the Defence Headquarters said the military was not involved in dispersing the protesting Shiite members. The Nigerian Army,

however, kept sealed lips on its alleged involvement.

Defence Headquarters spokesman, Brigadier-General John Agim, told **Vanguard** on the telephone that contrary to reports in some quarters, the military was not involved.

According to him, dealing with such protest is purely the job of the police and not the military.

He said: “Was the military there? That is the work of the Police; the military was not involved in dispersing the protesters. I have seen it in the social media, the military was not there. That is something that only Police can do. The military was not part of it.”

On his part, the Nigerian Army maintained sealed lips on the issue, in spite of attempts to get the service to speak.

Army spokesman, Brigadier-General Texas Chukwu, when asked to react to alleged involvement of the Army in dispersing the protesters, told **Vanguard** he was too busy in a meeting with the Chief of Army Staff, Lt. General Tukur Buratai, asking that he be left alone to focus on the meeting.

“Let’s talk about that later, I’m very busy now with COAS (Chief of Army Staff),” he said and switched off his phone.

### **Let there be inquest into the fracas — PDP**

Meanwhile, Peoples Democratic Party, PDP, in its reaction to the clash, yesterday called for an immediate inquest into the alleged violent clash between security forces and members of the Shiite movement, in the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Abuja.

In a statement signed by the National Publicity Secretary, Kola Ologbondiyan, the party said an inquest into what truly led to the crisis would go a long way to determine the causative factors of the chaos, which expectedly grounded business activities in the city centre.

“Our party is gravely worried over the handling of security in the nation’s capital and the near breakdown of law and order, which resulted in stampede and disruption of public and private businesses in the city centre.

“The PDP has noted that the development is linked with protests over the continued refusal of the All Progressives Congress (APC)-led Federal Government to release

the leader of the group, Sheik Ibrahim El-Zakzaky, despite being granted bail by courts of competent jurisdiction.

“The PDP and indeed all lovers of democracy across the country are deeply concerned by the continued erosion of democratic tenets by the APC administration, resulting in avoidable crisis in various parts of the country,” the statement read in part, and called for “immediate solution to prevent the crisis from further escalation,” the statement read.