

NEWS

YORUBA NATION: How Lagos rally turned bloody, girl killed

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The suppression of yesterday's Yoruba Nation rally by security agents in Lagos has attracted knocks from socio-cultural groups, who accused the Federal Government of muzzling freedom of expression.

They were particularly angered by the dispersal of protesters with tear gas, water cannons and the death of a 14-year-old street trader after the police allegedly fired shots.

The deceased, who was simply identified as Jumoke, was said to have been hit in the back while running when the police started firing into the air.

However, the police denied the allegation, describing it as a ploy to create confusion and fear.

Denial

Spokesman for Lagos State Police Command, Olumuyiwa Adejobi, in a statement, said: "The Command hereby wishes to debunk the rumour and state categorically that it's a calculated attempt to create confusion and fear in the minds of the good people of Lagos State and the country at large.

"The Command did not fire a single live bullet at Ojota rally today. The said corpse was found wrapped and abandoned at a distance, far from Ojota venue of the rally, behind MRS Filling Station, inward Maryland, on the other side of the venue, with dried blood stains suggesting that the corpse is not fresh.

"After a close look at the corpse, a wound suspectedly sustained from a sharp object was seen on it."

As early as 8 am, security agents had barricaded the Gani Fawehimi Freedom Park, the venue of the protest.

Armed policemen took over the major roads at Ojota, leading to traffic gridlock.

They were also seen searching vehicles coming into Lagos through Ojota.

Their presence didn't deter the agitators, who came out in large numbers for the self-determination rally.

The placard-bearing protesters were dispersed by the police after which they regrouped for another round.

Traditionalists

This time, they were led by female and male traditionalists who were in white attire.

As the ladies approached the venue of the rally, they



A scene from chaotic rally by Yoruba nation activists in Lagos, yesterday

first solicited the cooperation of the policemen before they proceeded but were denied access.

As the protesters proceeded from the Gani Fawehimi Freedom Park, inward Ojota chanting Oodua Nation solidarity slogans, they were stopped by security agents at a roadblock mounted by the police.

One of the leaders of the procession, Olasupo Ojo, who dressed like a white cap chief, engaged in a conversation with men of the Nigeria Police Force.

He was heard telling the police that agitators were simply holding a peaceful rally for Yoruba Nation. He added that they were not going beyond the area. Midway into the conversation, there was pandemonium as people scammed for safety following the firing of what sounded like several shots and tear gas.

Trouble

Trouble started after Lagos State Commissioner of Police, Hakeem Odumosu, addressed journalists at the venue, saying "no rally is allowed in Lagos."

The area was earlier calm as people were seen going about their businesses devoid of any chaos amid the heavy presence of security operatives.

Motorists and other road users were advised to ply alternative routes to avoid being trapped in the traffic as a result of road blockade, especially along Ikorodu Road.

Odumosu, led the police team on patrol while Nigeria Security and Civil Defense Corps, NSCDC, Lagos State Commandant, Eweka Okoro, led the corps around strategic areas to prevent any form of gathering by organisers of the rally.

Conspicuously absent were the major organizers of the event, Sunday Adeyemo aka Sunday Igboho and Prof Banji Akintoye, who vowed to convene the gathering despite warnings by the police and Lagos State government.

Igboho's absence may not be unconnected to a manhunt launched for him by the Department of State Security Services, DDS, after the raid on his house last Thursday.

The rally was earlier called off after the incident, but the organisers later insisted it would hold as scheduled. This is irrespective of warnings by the police and a show of force held last Friday in Lagos.

Intimidation

Meanwhile, various groups in their condemnation of the action of security agents commended the protesters for what was described as a display of courage in the face of intimidation.

Pan Yoruba socio-political organisation, Afenifere, lambasted the federal government for scuttling the exercise, saying it is muzzling freedom of expression in the country.

In a chat with Sunday Vanguard, National Publicity Secretary of Afenifere, Mr. Jare Ajayi, said: "Afenifere believes that in a democratic setting, the citizens have a right to express their opinion peacefully as long as it is done within the law. For that reason, what Ilana Omo Oodua and those who organised the rally in Lagos have done is still within the legal permit of the country.

"Just as our leader, Chief Ayo Adebajo, said recently, we are a law-abiding organisation and we represent the

citizens.

Since the government of Lagos State has given an order that such a rally be suspended, we feel the rally should have been suspended but not because the government is right.

This is just to show that we are law-abiding.

Suppress

"This present government, particularly at the federal level is muzzling freedom of expression, freedom of association and trying to suppress any organisation, body or voice against its policies.

"We are sure that if the Lagos rally was done in support of President Muhammadu Buhari, it is not likely to be stopped.

"In any case, the rally was not meant to be against this administration, it was planned to be an avenue to advocate or solicit the Yoruba Nation.

We believe that people clamouring for secession have a right to clamour as long as it is done within the ambit of the law and as long as they do not employ violence. We see no reason why government should stop them.

All government ought to have done is to watch them and ensure the rally is not hijacked.

"We believe that with the way it is conducting itself, it is attracting opposition and unnecessary criticism to itself. We feel that government should change its ways in this regard."

Also, Ilana Omo Oodua, IOO, slammed the police over the casualty recorded at the gathering.

No retreat

The group, however, hailed Yoruba people who defied the police to show solidarity with

the agitation for self-determination, saying "the struggle continues."

A statement by IOO's Media Communications Secretary, Mr. Maxwell Adeleye, said: "That the rally took place with thousands of participants despite police harassment symbolises that Yoruba people are not cowards.

"We have held our rally, notwithstanding the attempts to ensure we did not come to Lagos. That the people came out in their thousands is an indication that the Yoruba people are not cowards.

"We thank our women who led the rally from the front. May history be kind to them. We thank the gentlemen of the press for their support and solidarity.

"This is the beginning. It is no retreat, no surrender. The struggle continues. We are marching forward in the struggle to liberate our land from the shackles of oppression and intimidation."

Intimidated

Another Yoruba socio-cultural group, Kiriji Heritage Defenders, said it remained committed to realising an independent Yoruba nation.

The group said this during the investiture ceremony of Alebiosu Kalaowo as its Aare Ogun Kiriji at the Kiriji War Forest, Imesi-Ile, Osun State, yesterday.

Addressing the gathering after his investiture, Kalaowo, an indigene of Idanre in Ondo State, said no amount of intimidation can stop the people from demanding their right to secession.

He also gave a one-month ultimatum to anyone involved in free-range animal farming to comply with the ban on open grazing in the region, saying the group would no longer condone the killing of its people under the guise of grazing.

"I am using this medium to tell the world that despite the attack on Sunday Igboho, we will not rest on our oars to ensure that Yoruba nation is free from slavery from whoever and in whatever form," he added.

In a show of solidarity, an Igbo group, the Coalition of South East Youth Leaders, COSEYL, called for an independent investigation into the killing of the 14-year-old girl at the rally.

Dark days

COSEYL's President, Goodluck Ibem, spoke in a statement to newsmen in Owerri while reacting to the outcome of the Yoruba Nation rally.

According to him, "the Coalition of South East Youth Leaders, COSEYL, the apex socio-political youth group in the South-East geopolitical zone condemns in strongest terms the ruthless shooting of unarmed protesters.



(L-R) Acting CJ, Imo State, Justice Ifeoma Agugua; Rtd President, Delta Customary Court of Appeal, Justice Stella Ogene; Rtd President, Osun Customary Court of Appeal, Justice Oladejo Akanbi, and CJ, Cross Rivers, Akon Ikeme, at a reception held for them by the graduating class of 1980, Law Faculty, UNILAG, in Lagos.

ers at the Yoruba Nation Rally in Lagos State that led to the untimely death of a 14-year-old hawker, Jumoke.

"Peaceful protest which is a fundamental human right of all citizens is not allowed in a supposed democratic government. This is the first government since our return to democratic rule in 1999 that punishes Nigerians for protesting peacefully. Nigeria has gone back to the dark days worse than the Abacha military junta."

Igboho

In a related development, Igboho, in a statement by his media aide, Olayomi Koiki, titled: "My Persecution By Buhari Regime: Setting The Record Straight," said: "Nigerians and the world at large are aware of my resistance to the incessant killings, raping and kidnapping of my people in South-West by armed Fulani herdsmen. The failure of President Muhammadu Buhari and his government to curb the criminal activities of the murderous herdsmen necessitated my intervention.

"I ordinarily would not have intervened if government had lived up to its responsibility of securing the South-West and Nigeria at large from the criminal activities of the President's ethnic men.

"Of public knowledge, my intervention has not led to any loss of life or bloodshed. My means of curbing criminality is to chase the criminal Fulani herdsmen out of their hideouts in the company of the people of the affected communities. It is because of the foreseen government persecution that videos of such interventions were transmitted live on social media.

Ancestral land

"Nigerians, the security operatives, and the presidency are aware that I have never moved against the peaceful Fulani and other tribes living peacefully in the South-West. My unjust persecution for defending my people and community is therefore surprising and unwarranted.

"After several unsuccessful attempts to link me to any crime, the Buhari regime desperately opted to forcefully silence me so that the criminal herdsmen, who enjoy government sympathy, protection and immunity, can easily outrun the South-West.

"The desperation to acquire people's ancestral lands across Nigeria for foreign Fulani herdsmen because they share ethnicity and occupation with the President is well known to Nigerians and the international community. I am being seen as a threat to the fulanization agenda in the South-West, hence the desperation to soil my name."