

ISWAP responsible for Owo church attack —FG

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ABUJA—THE Federal Government, yesterday, fingered the Islamic State, West African Province, ISWAP, for last Sunday's attack of St. Francis Catholic Church, Owo, in Ondo State, that led to the death of 40 persons.

This came on a day six persons were shot dead by suspected bandits in Ondo town, Wednesday night.

The Federal Government also said that no arrest has been made on the kidnap of the Methodist Prelate, Samuel Kanu-Uche, and two other priests.

Briefing State House correspondents at the end of the Security Council meeting chaired by President Muhammadu Buhari, the Minister of Interior, Mr. Rauf Aregbesola, and the Inspector General of Police, Alkali Usman, said that the Owo Catholic Church attack was perpetrated by international criminals.

Aregbesola, who said that no arrest has been made, further said that the security agencies had been directed to go after the perpetrators of the act and bring them to justice, adding that the security was now zeroing in on them.

His words: "The National Security Council has just risen from its meeting today, which reviewed, very critically, all aspects of the security situation in the country and came up with conclusions, commending the efforts of the military and other security agencies in mitigating the insurgency, particularly in the North-East, where the fundamentalists there have been weakened, degraded and equally in the North-West, where the bandits are equally weakened, and the North-Central, where we're engaged with pockets of bandits.

"The council is quite concerned about the violent attack in Owo, and has been able to locate the perpetrators of that horrendous attack. From all indications, we are zeroing in on ISWAP.

"It is not an ethno-religious thing; the animals in ISWAP, wanting attention and recognition, are suspected to have launched that attack. We have directed all the agencies concerned to go after them and bring them to justice."

Killings in the

•Gunmen kill another 6 in Ondo •Attack was a revenge mission, Sarkin Hausawa Ondo alleges •It wasn't reprisal attack on Hausa Community —Police •No going back on anti-open grazing law —Akeredolu •Fish out perpetrators of Owo massacre, Afenifere tells Buhari •Engage monarchs to strengthen our security architecture —Makinde

name of blasphemy

Speaking further, the Minister stated that the Council is also concerned about killings in the name of blasphemy and has directed the security agencies to go after perpetrators of both incidents that occurred in Sokoto State and Abuja recently.

He said: "We are equally concerned about the spate of attacks in the name of blasphemy. The police have been directed to mobilize, identify and preempt all those involved in the blasphemy attacks in two areas of the country, namely Sokoto and Abuja, of recent. The assurance is that we are committed to maintaining law and order and providing adequate security for Nigerian citizens.

"Appropriate preparation is put in place for the elections coming up in Ekiti, this month, and Osun, next month, principally by Nigeria Police and supported by other security agencies, and to some extent, the military. That's the long and short of it."

17,374 policemen deployed for Ekiti, Osun polls

Also speaking on the level of preparedness for the upcoming Ekiti and Osun state elections, the IGP said: "As for how many policemen are deployed to Ekiti or Osun, I can say for the police, just like the Minister said, other security agents followed, but as for the police, we are deploying 17,374 policemen."

Responding to the recent kidnap and release of the Methodist Church Prelate, His Eminence, Samuel Kanu-Uche, the IGP said no arrest had been made but pointed out that the matter is still being investigated.

He said: "For the issue of the kidnapping of the Methodist Church Prelate, no arrest has been made in terms of suspects, but we are still on it, arrest doesn't have to come immediately. The case is still under investigation. The case is open and we are still looking for the suspects.

"We have leads; we have some issues that we are still following through, how the ransom was collected and how the

negotiations were done. We have information to that effect and we're looking at getting into the real aspect of getting the suspects arrested.

"As for the issue of helicopter attack, the allegations are there, the assertions are there. We have not been able to say there is any helicopter attack on innocent citizens like you have suggested, but most of the time, these assertions are made and up till now we've not been able to see or we've not been able to identify any helicopter that is flying and killing people unnecessarily."

Gunmen kill another 6 in Ondo

On the latest killings in Ondo State, a Police source told *Vanguard* that the bandits stormed Sabi area of Ondo town on motorcycles and shot the victims at close range.

While it was gathered that the victims were roadside traders in the town, the bandits reportedly robbed residents of the area before taking off.

Attack was a revenge mission, Sarkin Hausawa Ondo alleges

Speaking on the attack yesterday, Alhaji Abdussalam Yusuf, the Sarkin Hausawa Ondo, said the gunmen struck at about 12.30 am "Yusuf said that petty traders like Suya and tea vendors were still selling when the gunmen arrived in the community." He said: "The people came on motorcycles, 3 on each motorcycle. They opened fire on the people.

"There was a J5 driver who stopped to eat, they killed him. He was the first to be killed. They also killed a guard man. The other person was trying to lock his shop and run; they shot and killed him.

"Two other young men came and were eating noodles, they shot and killed them. That makes 5 of those killed. There is another community not far from us called Egba, they went there and shot one person." "We've not done anything to warrant the killing. They all dressed alike on the

motorcycles. Some saw what happened. They were saying they came to take revenge. I think it was what happened at Owo that they came to revenge on us.

"When it happened, in my capacity as the Sarkin Hausawa, I called the DPO of our local government and he sent a patrol team. We went and saw the bodies of those killed. We took the other person that was shot in the hand and stomach to the hospital." "We took the dead bodies to the mortuary. The Commissioner of Police permitted us to bury one but we kept the three bodies at the mortuary. Their relations said they were coming from the North.

"Asked by the *BBC Hausa Service* why he alleged that it was a revenge killing on his community, the Sarkin Hausawa said it was because such an attack had never happened in the community where they have been living for over 60 years.

It wasn't reprisal attack —Police

Contacted, the Police spokesperson, Funmi Odunlami, who confirmed the killings, said that attack was an armed robbery incident and not a reprisal attack on Hausa.

Odunlami, in a statement, said: "The attention of the Ondo State Police Command has been drawn to fake news being peddled by some mischief makers to cause panic, tension and strife in the state.

"The command wishes to state clearly that there was no reprisal attack on the Hausa Community at Sabo area of Ondo town or any part of the state as purported by these warmongers.

"On Tuesday, 7th of June, 2022, there was an attempted robbery on a J5 vehicle with plate no MKA-469 YJ carrying Onions and Potatoes coming from Zaria enroute Ore, had a stopover at Ondo town and was attacked by men of the underworld around 0110hrs.

"In the cause of this attempt, the robbers shot the driver, while the motor boy escaped with bullet wounds, a motorcyclist alongside the pillion and passerby were also hit by stray bullets.

— "It is, however, disheartening

that these peddlers, who are out to achieve no good, did not confirm the story before spreading this falsehood as the victims involved in this failed robbery are from Yoruba, Igbo and Northern extractions.

"Investigation has since commenced and effort is ongoing to arrest the assailants.

"This is also to warn the peddlers of this fake news to desist as the Command will not fold its arms and let them shatter the peace being enjoyed in the State."

No going back on anti-open grazing law —Akeredolu

Meanwhile, Governor Rotimi Akeredolu of Ondo State, yesterday, described the terrorists as animals in human skin, just as he declared that his administration would not back down on its Anti-Open Grazing Law.

Akeredolu said this when leaders of the pan-Yoruba sociopolitical organization, Afenifere, paid him a condolence visit.

The governor said: "What we have suffered is not just gruesome, for me it is like annihilation because these animals in human's skin did not come to kidnap, because they picked nobody.

"They did not come to steal because they took no Kobo. But they came to maim and kill. So, that is why we have never minced words to say they are terrorists.

"We have been reading the news, and I think this incident is the most internationalised in Nigeria ever. Today, the Pope is talking and tomorrow the House of Commons is debating, everybody is talking. I have got calls from many people, and I have gotten a letter from the US Embassy and others. Everybody is worried, I'm worried myself.

"If we were at war, it was not possible for us to lose 40 people in a day because we would all be armed and face each other. If you visit the hospitals you will feel even worse.

"I have been to all the hospitals over and over; there is no way the visit will not bring tears to your eyes."