

INSECURITY: After Ekiti, more children kidnapped in Benue

● Armed herders kill 15 in Agatu ● Bandits demand cough syrup, rice, N290m to release 7 hostages ● Abducted Ekiti pupils' school, parents, community launch crowdfunding for ransom, as IG deploys AIG Zone 17 ● Police arrest 8 suspects, urge residents to stay calm ● FHA director kidnapped in Abuja ● Parents of kidnapped Al Qalam varsity students beg abductors ● FG committed to end terrorism, banditry, kidnapping—SGF ● We're worried about insecurity in Nigeria—German ambassador

By Kingsley Omonobi, Henry Umoru, Peter Duru, Omeiza Ajayi, Rotimi Ojomoyela, Ndahi Marama & Obas Esiedesa

ABUJA — As efforts to rescue six Ekiti school pupils, who were abducted on Monday alongside their teachers and driver are yet to yield desired results, more children were kidnapped in Benue State on Wednesday evening. The children were among scores declared missing after armed herdsmen attacked Ugboju community in Agatu Local Government Area, LGA, of Benue State and killed no fewer than 15 persons.

The Benue attack occurred as the Police said they had arrested eight persons in connection with the Ekiti pupils' abduction; and as the school, parents and community of the students launched crowdfunding to raise the N100 million ransom demanded by the kidnappers.

Also, 18 days after several students of Al Qalam University in Katsina, were kidnapped on their way to the school, the parents have cried out over failure of security forces and Katsina State government to ensure their release.

However, the Federal Government, yesterday, said it is committed to addressing the menace of Boko Haram, banditry,

kidnapping and terrorism bedeviling some parts of the country, and urged all hands on deck to combat insecurity.

Meanwhile, bandits, apart from N290m ransom, demanded cough syrup, and rice among other items to release seven hostages they kidnapped at Kuduru community in Bwari Area Council of the Federal Capital Territory, FCT, Abuja, on December 28.

How armed herders killed 15 in Agatu

The Agatu attack left many persons injured and several others unaccounted for.

Among those missing were children of different ages who were reported to have been abducted from the community and whisked away by the invaders to neighbouring Nasarawa State from where the attack was said to have been launched.

A source in the area, who identified himself as Inalegwu, said that the marauders surrounded the community at about 5pm and opened fire on unsuspecting members of the community.

He said: "They came at about 5pm from Nasarawa State from where they are always launching attacks

on Agatu communities.

"After surrounding the village at about 5pm, they started shooting. People ran for their lives but they gunned down several persons and injured many others.

"After killing the people, they took away several children that could not escape with their parents. And nobody can tell the number of children they have with them. Apart from the children several persons are also missing and some sustained injuries.

"After they retreated, eight corpses were recovered and today (Thursday) seven more corpses have been recovered and the search is still ongoing. So, more corpses might still be recovered at the end of the search.

"They have sustained these attacks since the beginning of the year and we had no issues with them before this time; so we still don't understand why they are doing this."

They've turned Agatu into a killing field — Edoh, lawmaker

Lamenting the development, the lawmaker representing Agatu Constituency in the House of Assembly, Godwin Edoh, said the armed herdsmen had turned Agatu land into a killing field.

"They keep coming to

kill my helpless people for no reason. I am frustrated as a representative of my people by their cries. I have forwarded all the gory pictures to the WhatsApp lines of both the Governor and his Deputy," he said.

Contacted, the Police Public Relations Officer, Superintendent Catherine Anene, said she was yet to receive any information from the Divisional Police Officer, DPO, in charge of Agatu LGA, saying: "Let's wait for the DPO, I will confirm from him. As we speak there are so many police teams in Agatu who were deployed there."

School, parents launch crowdfunding for ransom in Ekiti

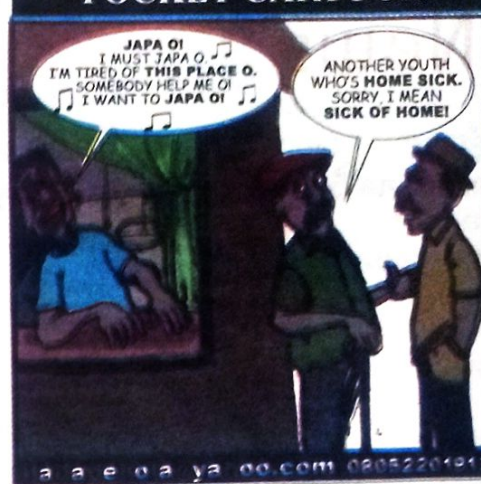
The management of Apostolic Faith Group of Schools, yesterday, launched a crowdfunding to raise money for the payment of N100m ransom for the kidnapped children and others in the custody of the kidnappers. *Vanguard* stumbled on a statement by the Vice Principal of the school, Mr Gboje Oluwafemi, soliciting for funds from the public for the payment of the ransom.

It read: "The management of Apostolic Faith Group of schools, Emure-Ekiti is using this medium to seek for financial assistance for the release of five of our students and four staff members who were kidnapped on Monday 29th January, 2024.

"The kidnappers are insisting on a N100 million ransom for their release. We will be grateful for your voluntary financial assistance."

In a telephone conversation with *Vanguard*, Mr Gboje who confirmed the action of the school, said that the kidnappers had called

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many times and were insisting on N100m ransom.

State of abducted pupils, others

On the state of the abducted children, he said: "The children are safe, some of them spoke with us and even the adults among the captives spoke with us. They usually give them a phone to talk with us, after which they start flogging them and we can hear their cries and agony."

Asked if the community had been able to raise anything, he said: "The community is raising their own, and they said the school too should go and raise some funds and the parents too and we would now put everything together, so that when they call again we would be able to tell them the amount of money we have on ground."

When reminded that there is a law against giving money to kidnappers, Gboje said: "It is not that we are giving them money, we are just preparing for alternatives. We know that the Federal Government is making efforts to effect the release of those children and others but we are just making plan-B arrangements. We are supporting the state and Federal Governments'

efforts; it is not that we are giving them money."

On how the colleagues of the abducted children are feeling about the situation, he said: "The National Association of Private Schools Owners, Emure Local Government Chapter had declared indefinite holidays pending the time those children are released from the kidnappers' den. No private school is operating in the whole local government, it's only government schools that are operating".

Victims' community, families raise N450,000

Vanguard gathered that as at press time, the community and families of the victims were able to raise only N450,000, a far cry from the N100m ransom being demanded by the kidnappers.

Vanguard learned that seven of the 10 kidnapped victims, including six school pupils, two teachers, bus driver and his conductor are from Eporo-Ekiti community in Emure Ekiti LGA.

Police arrest 8 suspects, urge residents to stay

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