

DAY 3 OF HARDSHIP PROTEST: Police accused of mass killings ... as security forces clamp down on Abuja protesters

- NLC calls Kaduna worst case scenario, threatens industrial action
- Force Headquarters fights back, says only 7 dead
- NUJ: 21 journalists attacked

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On Day Three of the nationwide #EndBadGovernance protest called by some Nigerians, the Nigerian Labour Congress (NLC), yesterday, pointedly accused the police of mass killing of protesters, relying on reports that about 40 people may have been killed by the security agency in two days of the protest.

The NLC warned that it might be forced to declare an industrial action if what it called wanton destruction of human lives by the police continued.

This development came on a day the police, in defiance of a court order, clamped down on protesters who had gathered at the MKO Abiola National Stadium, Abuja in continuation of their protest.

At the instance of government, a court had ordered that the protest in the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) be restricted to the stadium to prevent it from being hijacked by hoodlums who were to be held in the streets.

The protest took place peacefully on Day One of the action on Thursday.

But the Force Headquarters, yesterday, fought back on the claim of mass killings, saying only seven persons had been confirmed dead in the two days of protest nationwide. It added that 681 arrests were also made.

However, it was not the NLC claim that the police leadership was responding to, but a statement by the Amnesty International that 13 protesters had been killed by security forces.

The nationwide protest had been called by Nigerians, especially the youths, to protest the downturn in the economy and what they described as bad governance in the country.

The action, which started on Thursday, August 1, is expected to last 10 days.

'40 dead'

Raising alarm over what it described as 'large scale' killing of protesters by policemen, the NLC, in a statement by the President, Joe Agaro, and titled, 'Stop This Massacre', the congress said: "With unconfirmed reports putting casualties at over 40 in two days of managing the #EndFamine protest across the country, we have sufficient reasons backed up by reports and video clips to call to question the professionalism of our security personnel as this represents nothing but MASSACRE of citizens."

It threatened that Organised Labour might be forced to declare an industrial action to protest innocent citizens if the wanton destruction of human lives by the police continues.

The statement read: "With unconfirmed reports putting casualties at 40+ in two days of managing the #EndFamine protest across the country, we have sufficient reasons backed up by reports and video clips to call to question the professionalism of our security personnel as this represents nothing but



Some people living with disabilities join the nationwide protest in Lagos

MASSACRE of citizens.

"Had the security personnel deployed the same thoughtless brutal precision against bandits or other criminals, our country would have been an eldorado."

"As the lead-agency in internal security management, the police bear the burden of this massacre."

'Kaduna is worst case scenario'

"Kaduna State Police Command under the watch of Compol Audu Ali Dabigi represents the worst case scenario in which one of the fleeing protesters was heard on camera desperately appealing to deployed police personnel to not shoot until his voice was drowned by a hail of bullets with the resultant death of a protester on the spot and several injured."

"In the same breadth, Edo State Police Command under the personal command of COMPOL Funsho Adegboroye represents the best in crowd management as he could be heard interacting and cajoling the protesters and almost effortlessly bringing them under control."

"It might be convenient to argue that the two states do have different socio-cultural milieux, however, an incontestable truth common to both, and indeed, all the states is that human life is sacred and should NEVER be taken."

"Abuja tear gassing" "We are deeply saddened by this wanton taking of life by trigger-happy police personnel. In Asokoro, Abuja under the command of Compol Bennett Igweh, protesters were heard querying why the police were shelling or tear-gassing them as they were marching solemnly without breaking a twig."

their colleagues in other parts of the world manage equally challenging (if not worse) situations?

'Cops with blood stained hands'

"For a start, we demand that the cops with blood stains on their hands be fished out for appropriate disciplinary action. Ditto their commanders."

"Secondly, adequate compensations should be paid to the families of casualties while government should be responsible for the treatment and rehabilitation of the injured."

"Thirdly, all those arrested should be released immediately and unconditionally."

"We commend NBA national leadership for directing its human rights committees across the cities to be vigilant. We urge them to see it to it that no one is held against their will in connection with the protest."

"On no account again should the police use live ammunition in managing protests no matter how difficult they get."

'Days ahead'

"In the days ahead, we look forward to a better crowd control mechanism even as the new directive from the IGP would sound to some of the personnel as a license to kill without reason."

"We would be monitoring closely as the situation unfolds. The police as the lead-agency vested with power and authority on issues of internal security should not only lead by (a good) example but an inspiration to other services."

"However, if the police in self-righteousness consider this advice as meddlingness and persist in their slaughter, they will be unwittingly creating a situation they were supposed to help avert in the first place. And we as members of organised labour will be left with no choice but the moral burden to act in protection of ordinary citizens."

"We do believe the ultimate solution lies with government, the decisions it takes, the compromises it is willing to make in the face of the genuine demands by the

protesters.

"As we had stated in our statements of July 22nd and 23rd, the clearest path to a lasting solution is for government to sit down with leaders of the protest and negotiate in good faith. Time is of essence as no one is impressed by the sophistry of government officials' huelings or threats by the police or the military. We are all Nigerians, after all."

'Only 7 dead'

But, defending itself, the Force Headquarters, said that, contrary to the figure released by Amnesty International claiming that 13 persons (protesters) were killed by security agencies in the protest against hunger in the country, only seven persons were killed, most of them, victims of suicide bombing and car accident.

Aside the dead, it said, a total of 681 criminal elements, mostly looters who broke into shops and pounced on critical government infrastructure as well as armed robbers who attacked innocent citizens, were arrested.

Force Public Relations Officer ACP Muiywa Adediji, disclosed these in a statement, yesterday even as he said: "The ongoing protest has obviously turned violent. We therefore advise law abiding citizens taking part in the protest across the country to immediately withdraw from it."

The statement read: "The Nigeria Police Force finds it necessary to refute a recent report publicized by Amnesty International, which claims that thirteen (13) individuals have lost their lives due to the protests in Nigeria that began on 1st August 2024."

"Amnesty International further alleges that security personnel deliberately employed tactics designed to kill while managing gatherings and used firearms as a tactical tool for protest management."

"The Nigeria Police Force wishes to provide an accurate account of incidents from the first two (2) days of the nationwide protests."

Terrorist attack

"In Borno State, four (4) individuals lost their lives and thirty-four (34) were severely

injured in a terrorist attack by suspected Boko Haram/ISWAP elements who infiltrated the crowd of protesters and detonated an Improvised Explosive Device (IED).

"Additionally, an incident occurred involving an unregistered Honda Prelude car that ran into the protesters resulting in the deaths of two (2) civilians."

"The driver abandoned the vehicle and fled the scene. Although the vehicle was vandalized after the incident, it has been recovered and is currently in police custody."

"Efforts are ongoing to trace the driver and bring him to justice."

"There was another incident reported in Yauri, in Yauri Local Government Area of Kebbi State where a group of individuals mobilized to loot a shop."

"In the process, a local vigilante man shot and killed one of the looters."

"The Commissioner of Police in charge of Kebbi State is currently investigating the incident."

"This brings the total number of deaths recorded during the protests to seven (7)."

"It is important to state that there were no other recorded fatalities during the protests apart from those mentioned above."

"However, incidences of armed robbery, arson, mischief, looting of public institutions and private businesses, destruction of both public and private property were recorded during the protest."

"Arrests were made with respect to these criminal incidences and a number of recoveries made from the suspects while the protest was going on."

"The Nigeria Police personnel deployed to manage the protest have acted professionally, refraining from using lethal weapons."

Teargas

"In instances where protesters became riotous, the police employed teargas to disperse them."

"Even when our officers on lawful duty were attacked and injured, the police effected arrests using only teargas demonstrating utmost restraint."

"In an effort to combat the trend of crimes and criminality, the police have arrested a total of six hundred and eighty-one (681) individuals who committed various criminal offenses."

"such as armed robbery, arson, mischief, and destructions of both public and private property."

"Dangerous weapons, including two (2) AK-47 rifles and assorted live ammunition, were recovered from the so-called protesters."

"Additionally, stolen items such as furniture, electronics, phones, other various shop items, and vital infrastructures worth billions of naira were recovered from the arrested persons."

"Contrary to circulating news, organizers of the protest or protesters were not arrested."

"Those in police custody are under investigation for clear connections to criminal activities."

"Furthermore, nine (9) police officers sustained various degrees of injuries during attacks by protesters."

"One of them who initially was

reported dead, miraculously survived but remains in critical condition."

"The ongoing protest has obviously turned violent. We therefore advise law abiding citizens taking part in the protest across the country to immediately withdraw from it."

"This advice becomes necessary in view of the violence that has characterized the protest in the last 2 days."

Withdraw

"It is reasonably expected that peaceful protesters would have withdrawn from the protest that has turned violent."

"The Nigeria Police is committed to providing accurate information and ensuring the safety and security of all citizens during these challenging times."

"It is essential to recognize that the strategic deployment by the Nigeria Police Force, in collaboration with other security agencies, and the decisive clampdown on criminal elements exploiting the protests for unlawful activities, has been highly effective in quelling tension and curtailing the violence and anarchy witnessed on the first day of the protests."

"During this challenging period, the Nigeria Police Force reaffirms its commitment to performing its lawful duties with professionalism, maintaining law and order, and preventing anarchy throughout the country."

"The Nigeria Police urges all citizens and residents to disregard unfounded and psychologically manipulative reports circulating about incidents during these protests."

Security forces defy court order, disperse protesters at MKO Abiola Stadium

Yesterday, security operatives forcibly dispersed protesters who had gathered in front of the Moshood Abiola National Stadium, upholding a court order that restricted the demonstration to the stadium premises.

The protesters, who were exercising their right to freedom of assembly, were met with teargas and intimidation by the security personnel.

The crackdown left many demonstrators frustrated.

"We just wanted to make our voices heard, but they wouldn't let us," said Evelyn, a protester who was present at the scene. "It's like they're trying to silence us, but we won't be quiet."

Another protester, Tunde Oyedele, added, "We're not troublemakers. We just want change. But every time we try to speak out, they shut us down. It's like our voices don't matter."

When a Sunday Vanguard correspondent, who identified himself properly as a journalist, attempted to enter the stadium, the security personnel denied access, stating, "Find your way out of here. You can't park your vehicle inside the stadium either. There is no protest here. We were told there is not going to be a protest here anymore."

This contradicts the court order and raises questions about the security operatives' authority.

Despite the tensions, vehicular movement and businesses are gradually picking up momentum in the nation's capital on the third day of protest against hunger and economic hardships.

The city appears to be normalizing, with citizens going about their daily activities.

The incident highlights concerns about the suppression of free speech and the rule of law in Nigeria, leaving many to wonder if their voices will ever be heard.

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