

27 suspected kidnappers, gunmen killed in Enugu

By Anayo Okoli

ENUGU—No fewer than 27 suspected kidnappers, including members of the *Auto Pilot*, also known as *Unknown Gunmen*, a breakaway faction of the proscribed Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) loyal to the Finland-based Simon Ekpa, were neutralised yesterday by security forces.

According to a police detective, they were gunned down in shoot-outs with security operatives at various locations across the state in the past two weeks.

This was as residents of the state appealed to the governor to invoke the provisions of the state's criminal code and demolish all the property used by kidnappers and other criminal elements as stash houses, saying it would serve as a deterrent to criminals.

Speaking at Ugwuogo Nike-Opi Road, yesterday, a Police Superintendent, Onochie Ezeh, who led a joint security operation to rescue some kidnap victims, said the operation led to the killing of a seven-man-gang of kidnappers at Ogbeki Nike where the kidnappers used a large poultry farm to hide their hostages.

He explained that yesterday's successful operation was part of the sustained operations in the state to flush out criminals operating from other neighbouring states.

He said: "We have been on the trail of these kidnappers for more than three months now. They had been operating within this axis where they kidnapped their victims and kept them at a large poultry farm at Ogbeki Nike until ransoms were paid.

"So, on a tip-off from members of the public who suspected the strange movements in the area and the accounts of some of the victims of these criminals, we swung into action.

"On sighting us, these men of the underworld opened fire on my men, and we quickly retaliated and overpowered them with our superior firepower."

Speaking further, Ezeh disclosed that the combined security task force, set up by the Enugu State governor, Mr Peter Mbah, as a tactical squad against kidnappings and activities of unknown gunmen, had recorded milestones in policing the state and flushing out criminal elements.

Residents urge govt to demolish property used as

kidnap hideouts

Meanwhile, residents in the state have called on Governor Mbah to go beyond arresting and hunting down the kidnappers to invoke his power as the chief security officer of the state through the demolition of all the property harbouring the kidnappers.

According to them, the law empowers the state government to demolish buildings used for kidnap activities, including hotels and private facilities.

A senior lawyer, Ani Iheanacho, who spoke to newsmen in Enugu, said the state has an existing criminal law, which was amended in 2016 to accommodate a new section that empowers the governor to pull down structures used for kidnapping.

"We cannot continue like this. Yes, beyond going after the criminals, the

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governor must show both political and legal courage to go after property used as hostage holding cells and bring them down irrespective of who the owners are."

One of the rescued kidnap survivors, Dr Kate Pamela, said she was traumatised by the ugly experiences at the hands of the kidnappers.

She said: "Each time I pass through that poultry, I feel I have been denied justice by still allowing it to operate. They kidnapped us and kept us there for five days. They even killed two of the victims because their families could only afford N10 million each against the N50 million demanded.

"Notwithstanding that I was able to identify the bodies of three of the kidnappers when they were killed, I still feel that the area should be

cleared. Government must ensure justice by turning that place into a landfill."

Govt to pull down affected buildings

Recall that Enugu State government said a list of buildings has already been compiled whether they be private residences or business premises used for kidnapping for ransom and they will be pulled down.

Secretary to the State Government, Chidiebere Onyia, disclosed the government's threat in a statement on Tuesday.

Onyia stated that the step was a continuation of the determined efforts by Governor Peter Mbah's administration to curb crimes.

APGA alleges plot to rig Anambra LG polls

By Luminous Jannamike

ABUJA—The All Progressive Grand Alliance (APGA) has raised concerns about an alleged plot by the Anambra State House of Assembly to rig the upcoming local government polls in the state.

APGA National Chairman, Edozie Njoku, made this allegation at a press conference, yesterday, in

Abuja.

He accused the state Assembly of tinkering with the law establishing the Anambra State Independent Electoral Commission (ANSIEC) to prevent APGA from fielding candidates in the polls.

The polls, scheduled for September 28, will elect officials for the 21 local government areas in the state.

"It is uncanny for the Anambra State House of Assembly to have embarked on the amendment of the law establishing ANSIEC for the sole purpose of denying APGA the

right to field legitimate candidates in the forthcoming LGA elections in Anambra State," he said.

Njoku apologised to APGA members in Ebonyi State and other states where the party's participation in local government elections was affected by the protracted leadership battle.

He assured party members in states where they have yet to be recognised by state electoral commissions that APGA would explore all avenues to ensure their rights are not trampled upon.

Yoruba community in Enugu gets first Oba

THE Yoruba community in Enugu State has unanimously selected Abdulazeez Adebayo as its new traditional ruler.

Adebayo, who hails from Osun, became the first ever Oba of the community since the history of the Yoruba living in Enugu.

Speaking during the community's meeting on Tuesday in Enugu, the new traditional ruler said that states of Oyo, Osun, Ogun, Ondo, Ekiti, Lagos, Kogi, and Kwara, made up the Yoruba community in Enugu.

Adebayo revealed that the Yoruba ethnic nationality in the state comprised Ibadan Progressive Union, Ede Descendants, as well as Olateji, Ekiti, Ondo, and Ilorin Descendant Unions.

"Today, the Ibadan Progressive Union decided to associate and join the Progressive Yoruba Community in Enugu State since what we have

been yearning for many years: to have an Oba has come true."

On how he was chosen, Adebayo said the process entailed looking for somebody with a good record, good behaviour, and who could take care of his people.

According to him, the person must also be trustworthy and ensure quality representation of Yoruba people in the state.

Explaining how the clamour for the Yoruba in Enugu to have an Oba started, he said some people indicated an interest in contesting for the position in 2018.

Adebayo added that after the screening, a report about the aspirants was submitted to the Yoruba community.

"We lost about three persons in the process of waiting to choose who will be our Oba.

"This is what the Yoruba elders

saw and decided to bring a neutral person who is trusted and I was called upon to take the position.

"I came to Enugu on Feb. 7, 1979, and since then, I have lived peacefully in the state," he said.

While urging them for support, love, and unity, Adebayo appealed to other Yoruba, who were not in the fold, to join the community.

In his remarks, one of the aspirants, Valentine Adesina, noted that there had been a leadership tussle among the aspirants.

"After the general meeting, they agreed to have a committee that will look into that; we were about seven including me but it was reduced to three.

"We didn't do an election but we considered certain criteria like age and character; and at the end of the day, the elders came up with Adebayo."