

## Police Invasion Of Nnewi Market: Racial Profiling, Mistaken Identity And False Labeling Gone Too Far

### ...Intersociety

**(Chima Ubani Center: 28<sup>th</sup> November 2018)**-It is no longer hidden that the Buhari/Osinbajo Government of Nigeria and its security agencies: the Nigeria Police Force and the Nigerian Army are undeniably and steadily using *hate policy*, *racial profiling* and *selective enforcement of the law* against the citizens of the Southeast or Igbo Nation. These, in addition to lopsided composition of the country's security establishments are also responsible for fuelling the recent military massacre operations in Eastern Nigeria particularly Igbo Land; leading to countless killings and injuries.

By government *hate policy*, it is a policy that makes the citizens of a particular ethnic or religious group target of state violence and other discriminatory treatments; perpetrated on the grounds of ethnicity, race or religion of the target population. This is done through the instruments of criminal labeling, false accusations and other extra judicial methods. *Racial profiling*, on its part, is discrimination against an ethnic or racial group based on the presumption that all members of the group share criminal traits or tendencies.

*Selective enforcement of the law* is arbitrary punishment of particular individuals or groups for legal violations or crimes or unsubstantiated others, rather than the equal punishment of all known offenders. *Hate policy*, *racial profiling* and *selective law enforcement* are unspeakably visited against members of the Igbo population in Nigeria on grounds of their ethnicity, religion, economic and cultural possession and affiliation.

The three despicable policies are so entrenched in present Nigeria that crude and deadly arm of the law including indiscriminate arrests, false labelling, prosecutorial vindictiveness, unlawful killings, enforced disappearances, torture and other inhuman or degrading treatments or punishments are maximally visited or let loose on any member or members of the Igbo population accused wrongly or rightly of being in conflict with the country's criminal law.

It is so bad and unspeakable to the extent that Nigerian security agencies go all out outside the legally provided channels or processes to falsely label or accuse Igbo citizens and subject them to extra judicial killing or torture as well as long and solitary detention without trial and allowing them to be presumed innocent until a court of competent jurisdiction says otherwise; as clearly provided in Section 36 of the Constitution and the African Rights Charter Laws of the Federation of Nigeria 2004.

While hundreds of Boko Haram insurgents who have massacred thousands of soldiers and police personnel; slaughtered tens of thousands of civilians and destroyed properties worth hundreds of billions of naira in Nigeria are indiscriminately being amnestied and released into the society (including the most recent release of 154 ex Boko Haram fighters), innocent members of the Igbo Population in Nigeria; unarmed and defenceless, are haunted, hunted and hounded with reckless abandon for no just cause. Members of the Nigerian Igbo population go through hell in the hands the authorities and personnel of the Nigerian Army, State Security Services and the Nigeria Police Force.

Apart from being labelled and treated as “terrorists” even without having been caught armed or engaged in armed resistance, the country’s security agencies go to the extent of cooking up unsubstantiated and unpardonable lies as a cover to unleash unspeakable state violence and long detention without trial against members of the Nigerian Igbo population. In most cases, those arrested and held incommunicado for years or several months without proper trial end up being discharged and acquitted by courts for want of evidence to sustain spurious felonious charges such as “terrorism” and “treason” slammed against them by the Police or Federal Ministry of Justice.

It is on record that the Buhari/Osinbajo Government of Nigeria has not secured a single conviction against any member of the Igbo population racially and vindictively arrested and labelled “terrorist” since July 2015. This is due to lack of evidence to sustain spurious charges slammed against them and inability of the Federal Government to prove such spurious charges. The 1999 Constitution and criminal laws of Nigeria unambiguously forbid all forms of jungle justice including *trial-by-ordeal* and retroactive criminalization and sanctions.

A clear case in point was the criminal parading on Sunday, 25<sup>th</sup> November 2018, of 33 members of the Igbo population arrested on Friday, 23<sup>rd</sup> November 2018 at their work places (markets) in Nnewi. The arrested citizens were accused of involvement in the “2019 election boycott street campaign” in Nnewi organized same day by one of the pro Biafra movements, during which a police Inspector was reportedly beaten to death with three others seriously injured. From independent sources including journalists on the ground, the arrest and criminal parading was a clear case of *mistaken identity and transfer of criminal responsibility*; which clearly breach the Constitution and others Laws of the Federation of Nigeria.

The Inspector General of Police, Alhaji Ibrahim Kpotum Idris had hurriedly flown to Awka, Anambra State Capital, the Police Force Public Relations Officer, ACP Jimoh Moshood and directed him to parade the arrested citizens before the media as “killers of a Police Inspector,” “terrorists” and “snatchers of two AK-47 rifles and a Barreta Pistol” as well as “arsonists”. The arrested and detained citizens were not only criminally paraded and controversially accused but also their pleading of innocence and revelation of being arrested in front of their market shops within Nkwo-Nnewi Market did not mean anything to the authorities of the Nigeria Police Force.

All the arrested and detained citizens paraded were independently identified as shop owners and their servants arrested while leaving their shops at closing hours of their markets. They were further labelled “terrorists” who must be arraigned for “terrorism”. The criminally paraded citizens cried profusely, pleaded innocence and denied any involvement; disclosing that they were leaving their shops for their respective homes when arrested and had no idea whatsoever concerning the alleged beating to death of a police Inspector and snatching of the said rifles and Barreta Pistol.

Shocking, too, according to some journalists that attended the criminal parading of the 33 traders, was a drama that ensued before the criminal parading where the 34 persons originally pencilled down for the criminal parade, were suddenly reduced to 33 when the IGP’s rep and others discovered that among them was a Fulani-Hausa Muslim, named *Abubakar Mohammed*. He was not only instantly separated from the rest but also have his name deleted from the list. This is a height of *racial profiling* and *selective enforcement of the law* being complained.

Names of the innocent traders arrested and paraded are: Uche Amos, 65yrs (Nnewi North), Eliazer Emmuel, 24yrs (Umunneochi, Abia State, trading in Nnewi), Eliazer Chima, 23yrs (Umunneochi, Abia State, trading in Nnewi), Mmaduabuch Obeta, 19yrs (Nsukka, trading in Nnewi), Somtochukwu Okafor, 17yrs (servant trader in Nnewi), Agboma Jude, 35yrs (Nsukka, trading in Nnewi), Kelechi Ezech, 20yrs (Nnewi), Okafor Chiemerie Olisa, 20yrs (Nnewi North), Raphael Ogoh, 27yrs (Nnewi South), Chisom Okeke, 19yrs (Nnewi North), Daniel Nwakpu, 35yrs (Ikwo, Ebonyi State, trading in Nnewi), Friday Nwafor, 34yrs (Ishielu, Ebonyi State, trading in Nnewi), Onyeka Nwajiobi, 49yrs (Nnewi North), Obeta Uwakwe, 25yrs (Igboeze, Enugu State, trading in Nnewi), Festus Odika, 41yrs (Nnewi North) and Emmanuel Okoye, 22 (Nnewi North).

Others are: Sunday Umeh, 41 (Aguata, trading in Nnewi), Ike Chimezie Samuel (trading in Nnewi), Sunday Ilonze, 43 (Nnewi North), Emeka Nwaese, 32yrs (Nnewi North), Odogu Chima, 23yrs (Nnewi North), Jacob Monday, 48yrs (Nnewi South), Vincent Okoroafor, 39yrs (Owerri North, trading in Nnewi), Jude Eke, 32yrs (Igboeze South, Enugu State, trading in Nnewi), Charles Ukazu, 35yrs (Ideato North, Imo State, trading Nnewi), Eziokwu Ernest, 17yrs, (Nnewi North), Chibuike Ozoemena, 30yrs (Ikeduru, Imo State, trading in Nnewi), Chigozie Onyeogaziri, 46yrs (Nnewi North), Nwankwo Donatus, 48yrs(Orumba South, trading in Nnewi), Okafor Olisa, 20yrs (Nnewi North), Peter Nwankwo, 25yrs (Nnewi South), Ezezonna Oduagu (trading in Nnewi) and Ebegboni Geoffrey, 43yrs (Ika South, Delta State, trading in Nnewi).

As reported by the Punch Newspaper of Wednesday, 28<sup>th</sup> November 2018 (published in the evening of Tuesday, 27<sup>th</sup> November 2018), the unlawful arrest, detention and criminal parading of the traders later on Tuesday, 27<sup>th</sup> November 2018, sparked off a peaceful protest in and around Nnewi. The protest, involving about 10,000 traders of the Nkwo-Nnewi Market, including wives of the arrested traders, was organized by the leaderships of eight market unions in the Nkwo-Nnewi Market including the Nnewi Motor Spare Parts Dealers Association, whose members were wrongly arrested, unlawfully detained and criminally paraded by the rep of the Inspector General of Police. The peaceful protest also led to all the shops in the affected markets shut and put under lock and key.

Journalists were taken round the shops of the arrested and criminally paraded traders and their apprentices which remained shut and locked. The Anambra State Commissioner for Trade and Commerce, Dr. Christian Madubuko was also present during the protest and confirmed that “he saw the locked stalls belonging to the arrested traders” and that “the traders were wrongly arrested and accused”.

The Chairman of the Nkwo-Nnewi Motor Spare Parts Dealers Association, Mr. Gabriel Chibueze had while addressing the media during the protest disclosed that the main entrance gate into the Market, locked to safeguard the Market and protect the lives of his traders from the Pro Biafra street campaign and Police fracas; was forcefully broken by a combined team of soldiers and police personnel, who forced their way into the Market; leading to mass arrest of 43 traders inside and around the Market.

The leaderships of the markets who vowed to continue to shut down their shops in protest until their colleagues are released unconditionally; further disclosed that the total number of their arrested colleagues were 43, out of which 33 were (criminally) paraded on Sunday, 25<sup>th</sup> November 2018; with whereabouts of ten others unknown to them till date.

While **Intersociety** is not condoning the criminal act of attacking police officers on duty resulting in their death or injury anywhere in Nigeria, but the rush with which the Inspector General of Police responded and flew the Force Public Relations Officer to Anambra State for the purpose of effecting the criminal parading of the arrested citizens before the media without comprehensive and conclusive investigations is roundly viewed with utter shock and condemnation. It is also a clear confirmation of “selective enforcement of the law” and “racial profiling” of citizens of Igbo Nation under complaint.

Countless number of police officers have been targeted and killed in the North particularly in the Middle Belt by Fulani jihadists, yet the IGP did not shut down the Force Information Bureau or relocated same to the crime scene the way and manner he responded to the alleged beating to death of a Police Inspector in Nnewi or in the case of hundreds of defenceless civilians that are killed on basis monthly in the Middle Belt of Nigeria.

By recent account of the Government of Benue State, no fewer than 50 police personnel were killed in recent violent attacks in the State by Fulani jihadists; with no single culprit (Fulani jihadist) arrested, prosecuted and convicted till date. The Nigeria Police Force has also failed woefully in securing ordinary Nigerians and turned the Force into a cult; interested or responding only when its personnel are said to have been killed or attacked.

It is also the handiwork of failed intelligence, bias and hate policy that led to the mistaken identity and transfer of criminal responsibility in the instant case; whereby innocent traders retiring off their market stalls and premises were unlawfully rounded up or arrested and detained and-criminally paraded as “killers”, “arsonists” and “terrorists”.

**Intersociety** hereby calls for immediate and unconditional release of the 43 innocent Igbo traders of Nnewi base and tendering of unreserved apologies by the Inspector General of Police and the Commissioner of Police, Anambra State Command to the arrested traders, their market leaders and the general public.

The traders, when released, must sue the IGP, the Anambra CP and the Nigeria Police Force for general damages; so as to deter other overzealous law enforcement agents and agencies. The leadership of the Nkwo Nnewi Motor Spare Parts Dealers Association is singled out for commendation for not abandoning their members in such dangerous and critical hours of their ordeal.

**Intersociety** is also calling for the end of commercialization of criminal investigation and other police duties in Igbo Land and return to professionalism and intelligence policing

**Signed:**

**Emeka Umeagbalasi & Chidinma Udegbumam**

**For: International Society for Civil Liberties & the Rule of Law**