

Executive Summary Of Letter To Benue Gov

Resident & Ancestral Igbo People In Benue State Are Facing Widespread Attacks & Threats Of Annihilation

Onitsha, Eastern Nigeria: 4th October 2019-Our organization, the Int'l Society for Civil Liberties & Rule of Law, INTERSOCIETY, has written to the duo of Gov Samuel Ortom of Benue State in North-central Nigeria and the State Commissioner of Police, Mr. Garba Mukaddas concerning widespread and coordinated attacks and threats of annihilation against the resident and ancestral Igbo Populations in the State.

The letter, since dispatched to the duo, was dated 2nd October 2019 and signed by Lawyers Obianuju Igboeli, Head of Civil Liberties & Rule of Law, Chinwe Umeche, Head of Democracy & Good Governance and Chidimma Udegbonam, Head of Campaign & Publicity; and Emeka Umeagbalasi (a Criminologist & Graduate of Security Studies), Board Chair of **Intersociety**. The letter was copied to the Sec Gen of Amnesty Int'l, UK and the group's Country Director in Nigeria as well as the Executive Director of Human Rights Watch, USA.

Others that received copies of the letter are Prof Anthony Ejiofor, President of World Igbo Congress, USA, Prof Justin Akujeze, President of Ekwenche Research Organization, USA, Prof Uzodimma Nwala, President of Ala-Igbo Dev Foundation, Enugu, Barr John Nnia Nwodo, President Gen of Oha-Na-Eze Ndigbo, Enugu, His Excellency, Mr. Peter Obi, former Gov of Anambra State, His Honor, Mr. Oseloka Obaze, renowned diplomat and former SSG, Anambra State, Mr. Geoffrey Onyema, Minister of Foreign Affairs & (nominal) member, Nigeria's National Security Council and Prince Emeka Onyeso (Oba Agbala-Nze N' Nri Ancient Kingdom).

The rest are Mr. Tochukwu Ezeoke, President of Igbo Ekunie, UK, Comrade Aloysius Attah, Chair, CLO, Southeast Zone, Barr Justus Uche Ijeoma, ED, the Int'l Human Rights & Equity Defense Foundation, Onitsha, Mr. Emeka Diwe, President, Association of Southeast Town Unions, the Southeast Based Coalition of Human Rights & Democracy Organizations, Governor Ifeanyi Ugwuanyi of Enugu State and Governor Dave Umahi, Gov of Ebonyi State & Chairman of the Southeast Govs Forum. The letter was copied to them for their notice and appropriate and timely actions or interventions.

The ancestral Igbo Communities facing acute Government neglect and threats of annihilation in the hands of Jihadist Fulani Herdsmen and their splinter "bandits" in Benue State are majorly found settled in Ado, Oju, Obi and Okpoku Local Government Areas of the State while the resident Igbo population under coordinated 'indigenized' attacks including abduction-for-ransom and other sundry extortions at gunpoint; armed robbery, torture and killing in captivity or threats of same are largely found in Gboko, Adikpo-Kwande, Ukum, Zaki-Biam and Katsina-Ala Local Government Areas of the State.

The Igbo People in Benue State are presently made up of 'Igbo People of Benue' or ancestral Igbo People of the State and 'Igbo People in Benue State' or resident Igbo Population in the State. The former are those who migrated to the area on their own and those excised or carved into the State as a result of 'politics of State and Local Government creation and boundary adjustment' particularly in the exercises that took place in 1968 and 1976. The latter, on their part, are those who reside in the State for purposes of doing business and office work. A fraction of others are those who reside in the State for purpose of schooling. The population of Igbo People in Benue State is independently estimated at one million or more with indigenously locatable 300 villages or more.

The two sets of Igbo Population are facing 'indigenized' violent attacks (i.e. armed robbery and abduction-for-ransom perpetrated by 'local gangs', notorious political thugs and other criminal elements of the State origin) and ethno-religious violent attacks (perpetrated by invading Jihadist Fulani Herdsmen and their sister "bandits" or 'business kidnapping variant of the terror Fulani Herdsmen'). The third form of the attacks is the structural violence or acute Government neglect including communal under-development, insecurity of lives and properties, political segregation and exclusion, etc.

As publicly disclosed recently, the situation is so dire that in the past 30 months or between Feb 2017 and August 2019, no fewer than 50 Igbo citizens in the State were abducted for ransom and ethno-religious purposes. Among the abductees, scores have been killed or abducted without traces till date. This is even after huge ransoms involving millions of naira for each victim were paid. From available independent records, not less than N277m (\$900,000) had been paid by the kidnap victims as ransoms from Feb 2017 till date in freeing at least, 48 kidnap victims.

The leaders of the two Igbo Populations had further disclosed that the kidnap-for-ransom and targeted armed robbery are majorly perpetrated by the indigenes of Benue State including notorious political thugs, local gangs and other criminal elements who double as kidnapers. As a matter of fact, the two sets of defenseless Igbo Population are presently facing serious of threats of annihilation and total ruination of their legitimate businesses, to the extent that scores have already fled and left the State or relocated to friendly business environments within and outside the country. Others have also gone missing till date.

In the case of targeted killings, abductions and communal displacement including land seizure and confiscation and attacks on farmlands and sacred places of worship (i.e. churches), the invading Jihadist Fulani Herdsmen and their sister 'bandits' are strongly fingered or accused. Authorities of the Government of Benue State, the Federal Government and the aforementioned Local Government Areas located in the ancestral Igbo areas are further accused of acute neglect of the ancestral Igbo communities. The neglect includes lack of access roads, safe drinking water, good health, educational and electricity facilities as well as political exclusion and insecurity of life and property. Members of the ancestral Igbo Population are also discriminated against on the grounds of language, tribe and religion.

The concerned Igbo People in Benue State (Igbo Union in Benue) had on 2nd Sept 2019 cried out through the trio of Mr. Okafor Nnolim, Mr. Ndukaku and Mr. Ikem Ani during which they alleged 'abduction of not less than 50 persons in the State since Feb 2017'. Again, on 30th Sept 2019, a follow-up press briefing was held by the leadership of Igbo Union in the State, disclosing further that 'three prominent Igbo citizens in the State and not less than N277m had been lost to kidnapers'. The leadership through their Public Relations Officer further said that the N277m was spent in freeing 48 kidnapped Igbo business men and women.

While giving a breakdown of huge financial losses so far incurred by the Igbo communities in Benue State especially in Gboko, Adikpo-Kwande, Ukum, Zaki-Biam and Katsina-Ala LGAs of the State, Mr. Ezeadi, the Benue Igbo Union PRO noted that since February 2017 till date, there have been 48 recorded cases of abduction of Igbo business men and women across the aforementioned LGAs with a total ransom of over N277million paid out to these abductors and that some of the victims were murdered even after the demanded ransom had been paid.

Ezeadi gave a graphic picture of kidnapping activities against Igbo residents in the four local government areas as follows: Victims resident in Gboko LGA: Ugochukwu Ikechukwu, abducted Feb., 5th, 2017, paid N5 million before released; Ikeagwuonu Ifeanyi, abducted 28th Oct., 2017, paid N3 million before released; Chief Celestine Agbo, abducted 28th Sept., 2018, paid N5 million before released; Onyeka Okpara 11th Oct, abducted 2018, paid N4 million before released ;Ugochukwu Ikechukwu (Kidnapped for the 2nd Time) Dec, 1st, 2018, paid N5 million before released; and Aniegbu Chukwuka Kenneth, abducted 4th Feb, 2019, paid N10 million and yet murdered because of delay in payment of ransom.

Others are: Romanus Muoma, abducted 13th March, 2019, paid N6 million before released; Lolo Esther J. Nwoke (target was the husband but the husband escaped and the wife was abducted) 18th March 2019, paid N11 million before released; Oluchukwu Onah (a.k.a Orlando) May, 2019, paid N10 million before released; Mrs. Dycon (target was the husband but the husband escaped and the wife was abducted), abducted 7th June, 2019, Paid N8 million before released; and Chief Donatus Okeke Dunu, abducted 13th June, 2019, paid N5 million before released.

The rest are: Edwin Omeje, abducted 13th June, 2019, paid N3 million before released; Mrs. Chukwudi Arinze, abducted 1st July, 2019, paid N7 million before released; Leonard Nzere 8th Aug., 2019, paid N5 million released; and Cajetan Anya Ugochukwu, abducted 8th Oct., 2019, paid N10 million before released. Victims resident in Adikpo-Kwande LGA: Mr. Uzochukwu Okereke, abducted March, 2018, paid N5 million before released; Chief Fredrick Njida, abducted April, 2018, paid N5 million before released; Mrs. Okereke (Wife of Chief Okereke, who was earlier kidnapped in March 2018), abducted December, 5th 2018, paid N4 million before released.

Included in the list of kidnapped Igbo business men and women in Benue are Mr. Imo Okoko, abducted 13th January 2019, paid N3 million before released; Mr. Imo Okoko (2nd time of abduction) on May 7th 2019, paid N6 million before released; Mr. Charles Chukwu, abducted 17th July 2019, paid N6 million before released; and Mrs. Imo Okoko, abducted August 2019, paid N8 million before release. Victims resident in Ukum Zaki-Biam LGA: Mrs. Rita Arinze, abducted 4th June 2019, paid ransom of N8 million but still murdered; Ngozichukwu Onyedika Aghaedo, abducted 30th May 2019, paid N5 million before released; Mrs. R. N. Okeke, abducted August 2018, paid N6 million before released; Mrs. Emerike Udenweze, abducted December 2018, paid N8 million before released; Mr. Ifeanyi Ekeh, abducted August 2018, paid N5 million before released; and Mr. Christian Iloani, abducted 12th March 2019, paid N8 million before released.

Others from the same local government area are: Mrs. Ifeoma Eyiutche, abducted July 2019, paid N5 million before released; Mr. Chidi Okri, abducted September 2019, paid N4 million before released; Mrs. Chinelo Okafor, abducted August 2019, paid N7 million before released; and Mr. Fabian Ogochukwu Onah, abducted 7th September 2019, paid N4 million before released. Victims resident in Katsina-Ala LGA: there are 15 of them including; Mr. Leonard Enemu, abducted June 2018, paid N7million, but eventually killed; Miss Chinonye Ejikeme, abducted August 31st, 2019, paid N4 million before released; and Mr. Chinedu Onodo, abducted 10th Sept, paid N5 million, before released.

By the account of then President of Benue Igbo Development Union, Nweke Cedrick Ifeanyi in an interview with the Nation Newspaper of 10th April 2014 (*Agony of Igbos In Benue State*), *“the Igbos in Benue State particularly those in Ado, Oju, Obi and Okpoku LGAs of the State (settler Igbo communities) were in existence before the advent of Christian religion in Nigeria, but today suffer total neglect and abandonment by the Government of Benue State. Owing to this, the Federal Government should set up machinery immediately to return them to their kith and kin in the Southeast, particularly Ebonyi State, which is the closest State”*. According to him, *“the Igbo (settler Igbo communities) found in Benue are: Umuezeokoha, Umuezeoka and Oriuzor (offshoots of Nri), as well as Umuogbara, Amaekka and Amaezekwe who are originally of Ezza, Izzi, Ezzamgbo and Effium Clans in Ebonyi State. These are the people who would have been in present-day Ebonyi State but due to the fact that the Nigerian government then carved us into Benue in order to use our population to suppress our Eastern population. If you are to calculate the number of Igbo-speaking villages in Benue State, you find out that we are more than 600 villages because three of the biggest markets in our area are all in the Igbo-speaking part”*. The three Igbo markets are: Inikiri Ichari, Iddah, Iduokpe,”

Our Demands:

H.E., Gov Samuel Ortom was prayed in the letter to:

- **Stop all forms of discrimination against the two sets of Igbo Population or settler and resident Igbo Population anywhere in Benue State**
- **Capture the two Igbo Populations in the security mappings and strategies of the State**
- **Protect the Igbo businesses and their operators throughout the State esp in the aforementioned areas of the State**
- **Practically disassociate the Government of Benue State and its machineries from the ‘indigenized’ abductions, killings, torture and extortion of the Igbo citizens in the State**
- **Go after the perpetrators with full weight of the law and avoid aiding and abetting vicariously, if any, of the criminal activities and other atrocities of the so called “local gangs” and “political thugs” and others who may most likely be perpetrating the criminalities using the cover of Government or as leading or ruling political parties.**
- **Capture the ancestral Igbo communities in the State’s special security and safety arrangements or policies as captured in the Benue State Anti Open Grazing Law, among others**
- **Draft adequate security and intelligence operatives in those ancestral Igbo Communities.**
- **Install or encourage the installation of CCTVs and other detective devices particularly in the business and residential areas of key Igbo business men and women in Benue State as well as inside their cars and the sacred places of worship**
- **Carry along at all times the Igbo Union in Benue State and their leaders and assist them in ensuring that their businesses are safe and not ruined**
- **Reverse the present ugly trend in the ancestral Igbo Communities in terms of acute Government neglect and ensure provision of safe water, good health and electricity facilities, shelter, access and tarred roads, etc**
- **Ensure inclusion of the ancestral Igbo Communities in the State’s socio-political arrangement or alternatively liaise with the Govs of Ebonyi and Enugu States so as to meet the National Boundary Commission for purpose of returning them to their original home lands and Local Government Areas in Enugu and Ebonyi States.**
- **Order for coroners’ inquest into the recently unearthed bodies from the mass graves and ensure more searches for possible discovery of others for purpose of ascertaining how, where and when they were slain and who killed them and who they are.**
- **Set up a Judicial Commission of Enquiry into the kidnap of not less than 50 Igbo citizens particularly leading business men and women in the State as well as the loss of over N277m paid as ransoms.**
- **The consequences of leaving the above mentioned criminalities and associated atrocities unaddressed are dangerous and far-reaching including ruination of the economy of Benue State, victim-citizens’ reprisal radicalization and earning the State local, regional, national and international investment pariah status.**

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