

## A SPECIAL STATEMENT

### **Renewed Operations Python Dance & Crocodile Smile In Eastern Nigeria: Another Round Of Massacre Looming**

...Intersociety

***Onitsha, Eastern Nigeria: 8<sup>th</sup> October 2019-Fears of another round of military/police massacre, maiming, torture, mass arrests, long detentions without trial, disappearances and deliberate entrapment on the Easterners' fundamental human rights to freedom of movement and religion particularly in this year's Charismas and New Year festivities; in addition to other forms of intimidation or service gross misconducts are looming and growing day by day in old Eastern Nigeria including Delta and Edo States.***

***Already, there is a serious embarkation of creation of artificial or false insecurity in targeted or mapped out areas by the authorities of the Nigerian Army and the Nigeria Police Force. The whole idea behind creation of such false insecurity including possible stage-managed burning of service vehicles or facilities, provoked attacks and violence and 'arrangee' arrests and stigmatizations is to cash in on them to committee monumental service atrocities as highlighted above. One of such build-up grounds for another round of military and police massacre was witnessed recently at an Aba suburb called Ndiegoro mini urban in Abia State where Policemen ran riot, burnt and destroyed nine residential buildings and arrested and detained over 100 citizens including under-age and women and the aged.***

The above was contained in a statement issued by **Intersociety** today in Onitsha and signed by Lawyers Chidimma Evangeline Udegbumam, Head of Campaign & Publicity, Obianuju Joy Igboeli, Head of Civil Liberties, Chinwe Umeche, Head of Democracy & Good Governance, Ndidiamaka Bernard, Head of Int'l Justice & Human Rights; and Emeka Umeagbalasi (a Criminologist & Graduate of Security Studies), Board Chair.

***We hereby call on various civil society organizations including 'Igbo Civil Society Organizations', Amnesty Int'l, Southeast Based Coalition of Human Rights & Democracy Organizations, etc and media and religious bodies, etc to be at alert in Southeast and South-south regions of the country for purpose of forensically monitoring the movements and activities of the Nigerian Army and other branches of the Armed Forces and the Police particularly between now and end of Dec 2019.***

***By Section 22 of the 1999 Constitution, "the press, radio, television and other agencies of the mass media shall at all times be free to uphold the Fundamental Objectives (dos and don'ts of the elected and appointed public office holders including members of the Nigerian Army or Military and the Police) contained in the Chapter Two of the Constitution and uphold the responsibility and accountability of the Government to the People of Nigeria. This is strengthened with legal effect by Section 39 of the Constitution which holds that "every person shall be entitled to freedom of expression including freedom to hold opinions and to receive and impart ideas and information without interference"; Intersociety added in its statement.***

**Intersociety** was reacting to the Nigerian Army's announced commencement of 'Operations Python Dance IV' and 'Crocodile Smile' in Southeast and South-south, their adopted tactics and reasons adduced. Also revisited and strongly condemned are recent 'Army arrest and parade of "27 IPOB members with a recovered AK-47 Rifle" as well as Police atrocities (looting, vandalism, burning, mass arrests and unlawful detentions) in an Aba suburb of Abia State, called Ndiegoro mini urban.

It is freshly reminded that the Nigerian Army has earned notoriety in using disguised and unprofessional operations such as 'Python Dance' and 'Crocodile Smile' to execute ethnic agenda, which usually leads to massacre of targeted unarmed and defenseless citizens of particular ethno-religious nationality. In Sept 2017, for instance, the Nigerian Army carried a well coordinated massacre operation in Abia State under the guise of "Operation Python Dance 11", targeting members of the Indigenous People of Biafra and other general population and in the end, no fewer than 180 were killed and over 130 others maimed. The Army did not lose a single soul on its part nor bringing the perpetrators to book till date.

The same Nigerian Army and other branches of the Armed Forces and Police, with intelligence supplied by the SSS, had earlier between 30<sup>th</sup> August 2015 and 20<sup>th</sup> Jan 2017, engaged in series of killings and maiming, targeting unarmed and defenseless street protesters and other members of the Southeast and South-south populations; leading to death of no fewer than 300 and maiming of over 370. The killings and maiming then were perpetrated under the guise of "internal Security Operations". Again, no soldier was killed and no perpetrators brought to book till date.

Although the main target areas of the so called "Army Python Dance IV" in the Southeast remain Aba and environs and Afara-Ukwu, all in Abia State, but others are likely to include Ebonyi, Imo, Anambra, Delta, Rivers and Cross River States. The deceitful, unprofessional and disguised operations are also designed to further disrupt and cripple the socio-economic activities particularly businesses and peaceful movements in the Southeast and the South-south.

Part of such disruptive activities includes deliberate entrapment on the Easterners and their visitors' fundamental human rights to freedom of movement and religion especially this year's Yuletide or Christmas and New Year festivities. These are in addition to military and police siege already laid on the two regions or old Eastern Nigeria including Delta and Edo States since August 2015. In the Southeast alone, there are over 3,300 police dominated roadblocks, out of which the military accounts for not less than 150.

#### **Unprofessional Reasons & Tactics Justifying Ulterior Motives Of The Army Operations**

Citing or using "fighting kidnappers, armed robbers, bandits, arsonists, cultists, traffic offenses and other violent crimes threatening national security"; or conducting, identity verifications ("operation positive identification") as reasons for the said operations is totally a height of unprofessional soldiering or military unprofessionalism. It is also a brazen usurpation of service duties and responsibilities of the internal or homeland security providers. In other words, the reasons are not only militarily infantile and laughable but also clear camouflaging and usurpation of the professional and constitutional duties of the Nigeria Police Force and the spy or intelligence establishments, such as SSS and Police Detectives or Intelligence Units..

#### **The Professional Dos & Don'ts Of The Nigerian Army & Ors**

The clearly spelt out duties of the Nigerian Army or Military are the counterinsurgency operations against Boko Haram and ISWAP in the Northeast as well as the insurgency and terrorist activities of the world's fourth most deadly terror group or 'Jihadist Fulani Herdsmen'. As obtained in other parts of the world, Nigerian Army or the Military is trained and charged with the responsibilities of combating and managing the internal violent conflict or war and defense of the country's territory against external attacks or aggressions.

The Nigeria Police, on its part, is charged with internal policing security including detection, control and management of domestic or 'street crimes', the SSS is charged with gathering and managing internal intelligence and the NIA is tasked with gathering and managing external intelligence including at Nigeria's embassies, high commissions and consulates overseas as well as at the country's international airports, seaports and borders. These latter tasks of the NIA are performed side by side with the SSS

### **Blunders Of The Nigerian Army Justifying Unprofessionalism Of The Renewed Operations**

One of the unforgivable blunders of the Nigerian Army in the instant case is its operational tactics of the so called "Operations Positive Identification" targeted at the Nigerian Road Users particularly Igbo citizens and other members of Eastern Nigeria including indigenes of Delta and Edo States. According to the Army, "the operation positive identification" would involve mandatorily tasking the soldiers to "strictly check valid means of identification such as identification through 'National Identity Card', 'voter's Registration Card', 'Driver's License' or 'International Passport', or "other valid official identification before allowing such persons passage".

Apart from being elitist and clear grounds for extortion or roadway bribery, indiscriminate arrests, abductions, torture, extra judicial and unlawful killings and disappearances; it also expressly means that Nigerians or citizens without such elitist documents including the aging and the under-age, automatically become "kidnappers", "armed robbers", "bandits", "arsonists", "cultists", "IPOB terrorists", "419s" or "cyber criminals", "murderers", "rapists" and "road traffic offenders". Coupled with the fact that over 70% of Federal Roads in old Eastern Nigeria are in acute deplorable state, the so called "operation positive identification" is a deliberately designed punishment or roadway torture package meant to further keep road users or travelers for several hours on cue or artificially created acute or chronic traffic jams

On the other hand, it is also "in the wisdom" of the Nigerian Army that "kidnappers", "armed robbers", "bandits", "arsonists", "cultists", "IPOB terrorists", "419s" or "cyber criminals", "murderers", "rapists" and "road traffic offenders" do not possess and can never possess "National Identity Card", 'Voter's Registration Card', 'Driver's License' or 'International Passport', or other valid official identification". This is more so when violent criminals and harmless others (i.e. cyber criminals including advance fee fraudsters) are like every other citizen with easy access to the named identification items until they are on rampage. This is therefore the blunder of the highest order on the part of the Nigerian Army.

### **Arrest & Parade Of "27 IPOB Members With One AK-47 Rifle"**

The above is a clear attestation of the real motive behind the announced Army Operations practically targeted at old Eastern Nigeria including Delta and Edo States using the so called "Operation Python Dance IV" and "Operation Crocodile Smile". The announced arrest and parade and their accompanied Army accusation are likely to be false or amount to giving dog a bad name so as to hang it. In other words, it is likely a clear case of 'criminal stigmatization', false labeling and racial profiling. Apart from becoming the patterns and trends of the Nigerian Army since August 2015, the information publicly supplied by the Army is utterly half baked and sketchy as well as militarily and professionally questionable.

The Nigerian Army has also been living with lies and spinning of unforgivable proportion since August 2015. Till date, the Army had never accepted killing or maiming a single defenseless citizen of old Eastern Nigeria between August 2015 and Sept 2017. Issues of arresting defenseless citizens across the Southeast and the South-south and labeling them "terrorists" or "kidnappers" or "IPOB terrorists" have remained the stock in trade of the Army and the Police.

In August 2017, for instance, over 120 defenseless street protesting women were arrested in Owerri and labeled “IPOB terrorists” and “coupists” and in the end, it turned out to be false and the women got freed. In Nov 2018, the Nigeria Police and the Army under “JTF” claimed they arrested “34 IPOB terrorists at Nnewi and recovered two AK-47 Rifles and One Beretta Pistol” and in the end, the “34 arrested IPOB terrorists” turned out to be traders of Nkwo Nnewi Market, leaving their shops to retire home. In the end, they got freed but for four who hurriedly paid their Police captors N1.2M (N300k each) to be granted bail. In May 2019, the Enugu State Police Command announced the arrest of “140 IPOB terrorists” at Army Checkpoint along Nsukka-Benue Federal Road and in the end, the “140 arrested IPOB terrorists” turned out to be innocent and defenseless mourners who were returning from a funeral attended in a location at Nsukka. They were later released or freed by Court. These are just to mention but a few.

Therefore, in the case of the “arrested 27 IPOB Members with One AK-47 Rifle” including 23 men and four women, it is likely not going to be different from the above. This is more so when from our independent investigation, the 1<sup>st</sup> October 2019 when they were arrested in Ideato part of Imo State, there was no form of any gathering or meeting of the group being falsely accused. As a matter of fact and our investigation, the group and its members had distanced themselves from any form of activity marking the country’s 59<sup>th</sup> Independence Day as a protest over the ugly turn of events in the country.

Eyewitnesses also told **Intersociety** that there was a pro Government solidarity procession in Aba and other parts of Igbo Land organized by Mr. Raph Uwazuruike’s MASSOB-BIM. Specifically, they were sighted at Aba and environs being escorted by soldiers of the 144 Battalion; the same Battalion the Nigerian Army said arrested the “27 IPOB Members with One AK-47 Rifle” in Ideato part of Imo State.

This is more so when it was professionally strange for soldiers of 144 Battalion located in far away Asa, in Ukwa West, near Aba to have crossed their duty area or boundary to arrest people in far away Ideato South Local Government Area of Imo State which is under the 34 Brigade of the Nigerian Army at Obinze, near Owerri, Imo State. That is to say that the arrest is likely stage-managed or deliberate criminal labeling; all as a build-up to finding grounds for another round of massacre of unarmed, defenseless and innocent Igbo citizens, using the so called “Python Dance IV”..

#### **Aba Suburb Police Invasion, Looting & Burning As Part Of False Insecurity For Another Massacre**

The said Police invasion, looting and burning of nine residential houses in Ndiegoro suburb of Aba in Abia State and mass arrest of over one hundred residents including the aged, under-age and women and displacement of 400-450 others are being independently investigated by **Intersociety**. Going by facts at hand so far, the Police atrocities, falsely denied by the State Commissioner of Police (Ene Okon) took place following a misunderstanding between a Police racketeer/extortionist squad and local drug dealers and addicts particularly those selling and smoking Indian Hemp in the area.

It all started on 27<sup>th</sup> Sept when the police racketeer that also have earned notoriety in mounting roadblocks and collecting road bribes in the area went to collect their returns from the drug dealers and smokers; leading to misunderstanding and scuffle. The misunderstanding and scuffle further led to snatching of a police rifle and shooting to death of an officer and lynching of the civil driver of a hired “SHUTTLE” Bus, hired and paid for by the Police racketeer.

A Police team of about three from Ndiegoro Police Post operating on a hired “SHUTTLE” Bus with its driver had gone to the drug dealers’ hideout for their routine returns. The Police team was led by one “Alhaji”, a police officer of Fulani Muslim extraction. The misunderstanding led to scuffle which later resulted in grabbing of police rifle and shooting to death of the said “Alhaji” as well as lynching of the “SHUTTLE” Bus driver. Two other policemen accompanying the slain officer reportedly shot their way to safety and escaped. Ndiegoro Police Post is under the Cameroon Barracks Police Divisional Command.

Signals were sent across Police formations in Aba and in the late evening of 30<sup>th</sup> Sept 2019, eyewitnesses said not less than 12 Police Hilux vans, 5 commercial Buses and 12 tricycles were mobilized by the Abia State Police Command made up of General Duty, Mobile and Special Anti Robbery Police squads. The squads stormed the area and embarked on late evening mass arrests; arresting over 100 defenseless citizens including the aged, under-age and women.

Among those arrested, taken away and detained were Joseph Chukwu (69yrs), Chijioke Joseph (14yrs), Oluchi Joseph, Augustine Chukwu, Oluebube Okereke (19yrs), Chiamaka Joseph, Ifeoma Joseph (16yrs) and Kingsley Ogbonnaya (15yrs). Under-Aged Citizen Kingsley Ogbonnaya’s bail was secured at the Cameroon Barracks Police Station with sum of N26, 000. Name of one of the Police IPOs handling the matter at the Cameroon Barracks Police Station was given as “Inspector John”. It was further found that the arrestees were detained at various police formations in Aba and possibly including the State CID at Umuahia.

As if that was not enough, the atrocious Police teams returned to the area in the evening of 1<sup>st</sup> October 2019, vandalized and carted away valuable items before setting nine residential buildings in the area on fire or destroying some of them. The buildings, all downstairs, included Nos. 123, 127, 128, 129 and 130 Degema Street, Aba and Nos. 7 and 7 (A) Ababa Street and No.4 Oko-Jumbo Street as well as another located at Aba-Owerri Road, close to Ndiegoro Police Post. The latter building was said to have harbored one of the suspected attackers of the culpable policemen. It was further found that the smallest among the nine destroyed or burnt buildings harbors at least ten families while the largest contains 14 families. Each of the smallest families has two-three children while each of the largest among them has seven children.

Valuable items destroyed or looted or carted away by the invading and looting policemen included sitting plastic chairs, JP Tanks, doors, windows, portraits, tables, pots of soups and boiled rice, stew and meats; empty and filled jerry cans of fuel and kerosene, smart phones, computers including laptops, Plasma TVs, Audio Sets, Video Machines, small generators, cash sums, wrist watches, etc. An aging woman of No. 1 Oko-Jumbo Street was reported to have died of shock and trauma. Also but for heavy downpour same period of invasion and mass destruction, the buildings would have burnt beyond recognition.

This, totally, is a clear case of deliberate creation of artificial insecurity in Abia State as a build up for another round of massacre, using the so called “Python Dance IV”. As we speak, harassment and mass arrests of passers-by and other innocent citizens have intensified in Aba and environs. Reports are continuing concerning indiscriminate arrests and abductions by soldiers of 144 Battalion in Aba and environs including at Ariaria Junction-where innocent citizens going about their legitimate businesses are maliciously and hatefully accused of “being IPOB terrorists”; yet those who brandish AK-47 rifles in broad day such as terror and jihadist Fulani Herdsmen are overlooked and even protected militarily.

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