

The Guardian Online [Lagos] September 10, 2010

Ali Garba, "Boko Haram: How Attackers Outwitted Security Agencies; Sect Threatens To Strike in Jos Soon"

Had the Nigeria's security agencies taken the threats by members of the Boko Haram sect seriously, the recent invasion of the Bauchi Prisons and other killings in some parts of the North would have been averted.

Before the Islamic group launched their attack, The Guardian learnt that its leadership wrote a letter to the police of its intention. Security personnel, who confirmed this, said they even indicated the time they would carry out the threat.

According to sources at the Bauchi Prisons, the sect had in a letter and pamphlets, hinted that it would launch the attack before the end of Ramadan during Sahur (morning prayer) between 4.30 a.m. and 5 p.m.

It was learnt that when report got to the sect that security had been fortified at the prisons, it changed the timing of the strike to evening during the Magrib prayers.

The Guardian also got details of the inmates freed by men of the Islamic sect when they attacked the Bauchi Prisons last Tuesday.

A breakdown of the figures showed that the group freed 157 male and 17 female inmates in the prison during the attack. The prison also harboured 123 men and four women, who were already convicted while there were 130 males and nine females on the awaiting trial list and 140 armed robbery suspects, all men. The inmates on capital charges were 333 males, two females, two males on life jail term, two males to be stoned to death, 11 male detainees for amputation; six male lodgers and one male hospital attendant.

The sources said the extremist group "sent several letters, warning security agencies and the Bauchi State government of their intention that their members would not celebrate the Eid-el Fitr (Sallah) in prison. We thought it was a joke but now the reality has dawned on us."

A senior prison official said: "When we got the letters, action was taken. It led to the drafting of armed mobile policemen to guard the prison. There was a daily security report to the prisons' authorities at 12 mid night."

He lamented that "what happened last Tuesday was unfortunate because according to reports, the Boko Haram were set to attack the prison during Sahur in the morning between 4: 30 a.m. and 5 p.m. but they were informed by their own informants that their secrets had been revealed to the appropriate authorities and heavy security measures had been taken to deter them from carrying out their mission, they changed the time of the attack from morning to evening during the Magrib prayers."

In the pamphlets, written in Hausa, which they left behind, the sect explained that its name is not Boko Haram but Jama'atu Ahlissunnah Liddaawati Wal Jihad.

The members commiserated with the Moslem community in Jos, Plateau State capital over the recent crises, saying that for the past eight years they had been preaching peacefully until the present government attacked them.

"When we were praying our morning prayers they killed a number of people they wanted to kill, so, we will continue to fight this government because it is obligatory. Whoever does not want to participate, Allah will question him. If you cannot participate, close your mouth," they warned Moslems.

They also warned in the pamphlets that whoever had a hand in punishing their members would not go free, adding "if you want your wife, children to become widows and orphans, get ready and we will not forget the way our members were killed in Dutsen Tanshi Police Station and Yankari Park. Whoever had a hand in the killing of our members from the state governor down to district and ward heads, we have not forgotten and you will see what it will look like in the future."

The fundamentalists also said they are fighting to bring back the full implementation of Sharia law, freedom of Moslems and takeover of power from Christians, adding that Plateau State capital, Jos will soon be attacked for the killing of its members.

The Deputy Comptroller of Prisons, Bauchi, Ali Akida said the gunmen broke 29 cells of the prison, which accommodated 765 inmates, of which 732 escaped.

He explained that the suspected members of the Boko Haram targeted the hour when Moslems were breaking the fast while some were still observing their Magrib prayers at the Central Mosque, opposite the prison.

Akida said the invaders attacked the main gate of the prison yard, noting that they came with a power generating set and a cylinder, which they used to break the main gate.

"The members of the sect came at 6:35 p.m. and joined the sunset prayers at Bauchi Central Mosque. After the prayers, they blocked the Tina Junction and all the roads leading to the prison yard and opened fire.

"They killed one mobile policeman on the spot and badly injured six of our wardens on duty," he added.

Akida further said the attackers overpowered prison officials and forced themselves into the yard to accomplish their mission.

The prison boss explained that the marauders carried various weapons including AK 47 rifles, cutlasses and sharp knives and broke into the prison cells to free 173 of their members awaiting trial, adding that about 127 inmates that escaped for fear of their lives, had returned on their own.

"Three of our officials were shot and are responding to treatment at the Abubakar Tafawa Balewa University Teaching Hospital (ATBU). We recovered empty shells of bullets, cylinders used to light up locally made bombs and weapons used by the sect members to break the cells and the prison gate," he said.

The state Police Commissioner, Danlami Yar'Adua, at a press conference, said the attackers took the command unawares. He, however, said the police had arrested 11 suspected members of the group and over 20 inmates, who escaped from the prison during the attack.

Governor Isa Yuguda, who visited the prison to access the level of damage said: "All of us were caught unawares by the attackers because they came at the time no body expected it, considering that we are in the month of Ramadan when true Moslems are fasting and not to engaging in anything that will lead to bloodshed."

According to him, "henceforth, adequate security measures will be put in place across the state in order to ensure safety of life and property of innocent citizens of the state. Government will give priority to security issues in the state to ensure that innocent people are not lost again as well as to check the activities of all criminals in the state."