

# When human lives become statistics in Nigeria's endless insecurity

By Emmah Uhieneh

Nigeria has become a country perpetually in mourning. From the dusty villages of the North-East to the forests of the North-West, from the troubled communities of the Middle Belt to the creeks of the Niger Delta, from the highways haunted by kidnappers to the towns and cities living under the shadow of violent crime, grief has become a constant companion of the Nigerian people. Hardly a week passes without reports of another massacre, another abduction, another community displaced, another family thrown into anguish, another promising future abruptly terminated by violence. Yet amid this sea of pain, something even more disturbing has emerged: a collective numbness, particularly among those who seek power and those entrusted with the responsibility of governing. Nigeria's insecurity did not begin overnight. It evolved gradually, feeding on decades of unresolved grievances, poverty, corruption, weak institutions, ethnic tensions, environmental degradation, political opportunism, and poor governance. What started as localized conflicts and isolated disturbances eventually transformed into a national emergency. Militancy in the Niger Delta, insurgency in the North-East, banditry in the North-West, separatist agitations in the South-East, communal clashes in the Middle Belt, and organized criminality across the country have all become chapters in the same tragic story. A story written in blood.

A story sustained by neglect. A story prolonged by leadership failures. For years, Nigerians have buried their dead and moved on because they had no choice. Parents have sent their children to school with prayers rather than assurances. Farmers have abandoned fertile lands out of fear. Businesses have shut their doors. Communities have become ghost settlements. Entire regions have watched development retreat as insecurity advanced. Still, life goes on. Or at least, political life does. This is perhaps the greatest contradiction of the Nigerian condition. While citizens mourn, politicians campaign. While communities bury victims, political actors calculate electoral permutations. While families desperately seek ransom money for kidnapped loved ones, the nation's political machinery continues to operate with remarkable energy and enthusiasm. The rallies are organized. The alliances are negotiated. The defections are celebrated. The ambitions are declared. The campaigns never pause. One would have imagined that a nation facing such a profound security crisis would witness an unprecedented coalition of political leaders united by a singular objective: saving lives. One would expect political parties to suspend partisan rivalries in favour of a national rescue mission. One would expect influential voices to rise above political interests and mobilize citizens toward collective action against a menace threatening the country's very existence.

Instead, the country often witnesses something else entirely. The killings occur. Statements are issued. Condolences are offered. Promises are made. Then attention shifts elsewhere. The cycle repeats itself with such predictable regularity that tragedy has become routine. This raises uncomfortable questions that refuse to disappear. Who exactly are Nigeria's leaders afraid of? Why does the political class appear more passionate about acquiring power than protecting lives? Why do election campaigns often generate greater urgency than the rescue of abducted children? Why does political survival seem to command more attention than national survival? And perhaps the most troubling question of all: have Nigerian lives become so cheap that their loss no longer shocks the conscience of those in authority? These questions are not accusations. They are reflections born from decades of recurring sorrow. For every statistic cited in security reports, there is a human story behind it. There is a mother who never saw her child again. There is a father who watched years of labour disappear in flames. There is a young graduate whose dreams ended on a dangerous highway. There is a farmer forced to abandon ancestral lands.

There is a child growing up in a displacement camp, knowing more

about fear than freedom. Yet public discourse often reduces these lives to numbers. Numbers killed. Numbers abducted. Numbers displaced. Numbers rescued. Numbers compensated. Numbers forgotten. Somewhere along the way, the nation appears to have lost sight of the humanity hidden behind those figures. Perhaps this is the greatest danger of prolonged insecurity. It does not only destroy lives; it gradually destroys empathy. It conditions society to accept what should never be acceptable. It normalizes horror. It transforms extraordinary tragedies into ordinary news items. A society that becomes accustomed to death is a society in danger of losing its soul. The tragedy extends beyond politics. Religious institutions, which command enormous moral influence and millions of devoted followers, have not always demonstrated the level of sustained national mobilization that such a crisis demands. Churches and mosques are filled. Sermons are preached. Prayers are offered. Congregations gather in their thousands. Yet one is compelled to ask whether enough moral pressure is being exerted on those who hold power. If every life is sacred, why does the nation not respond to mass killings with greater collective outrage? If every soul matters, why do deaths often disappear from public consciousness so quickly? If faith remains central to the Nigerian identity, why has the sanctity of human life not become the defining national conversation? The answers are neither simple nor comfortable. What is clear, however, is that insecurity has become far more than a security challenge. It has become a test of national character. It has exposed weaknesses in governance, failures in leadership, deficiencies in institutions, and contradictions within society itself. The economic consequences are visible everywhere.

Investors hesitate. Businesses relocate. Agricultural productivity declines. Food prices soar. Infrastructure projects suffer delays. Development plans remain trapped on paper. Prosperity becomes increasingly elusive because no economy can flourish amid persistent fear. History offers a lesson that nations often learn the hard way: security is not merely another item on the government's agenda. It is the foundation upon which every other aspiration rests. Without security, development becomes fragile. Without security, investment becomes risky. Without security, education suffers. Without security, democracy itself becomes vulnerable. No nation has ever built enduring prosperity on a foundation of fear. Yet the deeper issue remains one of priorities. For many Nigerians, it appears that politics has become an end in itself rather than a means to improve lives. Power is pursued relentlessly, even when the conditions that justify its pursuit continue to deteriorate. Elections are treated as urgent. Human suffering is treated as unfortunate. Therein lies the moral crisis confronting the nation. Leadership, in its highest form, is not about occupying office. It is about protecting lives. It is about confronting danger with courage. It is about demonstrating that every citizen matters regardless of tribe, religion, region, or social status. When leaders lose sight of that responsibility, governance becomes hollow. When politics overshadows humanity, democracy loses its meaning. When the pursuit of power becomes more important than the preservation of life, society begins a dangerous descent.

Nigeria stands today at such a moment. The country cannot continue to pretend that insecurity is merely another policy challenge. It is a national emergency. It is a moral emergency. It is a humanitarian emergency. The blood that has been shed across the nation demands more than sympathy. It demands action. It demands courage. It demands accountability. It demands leadership. Above all, it demands a renewed recognition that human life is sacred and irreplaceable. For in the end, history will not remember how many political rallies were held, how many alliances were formed, or how many elections were won. History will ask a far simpler question. When Nigerians were dying, who truly stood up for them? And when the nation cried out for protection, who chose ambition over humanity?