



# Declare a state of emergency on security now

**T**he Nigerian nation is gradually grinding to a halt as a result of banditry, kidnapping and other forms of criminality. A coalition of over forty seven Civil Society groups and human right Organizations recently under the auspices of the Civil Society Joint Action Group has in one voice called on the Nigerian government to take actionable steps to end the endemic insecurity, mitigate further attacks by kidnap syndicates and terrorist groups, and, account for persons missing in these attacks". They gave the breakdown of Nigerians killed or abducted by criminal elements in the eight months of the Tinubu administration (243 days as of January 26) as 2,423 and 1,872 respectively. The report shows that June 2023 was the deadliest month as 507 deaths were recorded, followed by December 2023 when 446 were killed. In July 2023, 320 died, 275 in August, 232 in September, 224 in November, 215 in October and 171 in January 2024. Between May 29 and May 31, the first two days of the Tinubu administration, a total of 33 persons, according to the report, were killed.

Their cry is not far from the cry of the average Nigerians whose brothers, sisters, children and relations are victims of these endless spates of kidnappings, abduction and senseless killings that have snowballed into daily occurrence. The first responsibility of every government anywhere across the world is the security and welfare of its people. This is clearly enshrined in the constitution of the federal Republic of Nigeria (Section 14(2) (b) CFRN 1999 (as amended). "The security and welfare of the people shall be the primary purpose of government" (Section 14(2) (b) CFRN 1999 (as amended).

Unfortunately over the past decade and a half, insecurity in Nigeria has spiraled due to a variety of violent phenomena, including but not limited to terrorist activities in the entire northern region of the country, terror pillages otherwise known as 'banditry' in the North-West, farmer-herder violence in the Middle Belt including the Benue Valley, secessionist struggles in the South-East, piracy in the southern coast of the country, inter-communal attacks, political violence, cult-gang violence and kidnapping. These forms of insecurity have jeopardized the security and wellbeing of Nigerians, and have progressively deteriorated over the years. Endemic insecurity has persisted over the last three administrations, including that of President Buhari, who, as a former military general, had gained public trust to run as president by promising to curb the then fledgling insecurity. Mass atrocities fatality tracking across the country by Nigeria Mourns reveals that in President Buhari's second term alone (2019 to 2023), at least 24,816 Nigerians lost their lives, and at least 15,597 persons were abducted. This alarming trend has continued in spite of President Bola Ahmed Tinubu's assurance at the beginning of his presidency in May 2023 to tackle insecurity. It has now been 8 months since

President Tinubu took his oath of office and yet, things have failed to improve. Our tracking shows at least 2,423 people have been killed in mass atrocities-related incidents and at least 1,872 persons were abducted since the beginning of President Tinubu's administration till January 26, 2024. We are particularly concerned about the upsurge in abductions, noting that at least 230 incidents, in most of which multiple victims were involved, occurred within the first 2 weeks of January 2024 alone. Several communities across the country, including the Federal Capital Territory, the seat of government itself, are under siege, with entire families and in some cases, communities taken hostage. Residents are being forced to flee due to repeated attacks by terrorists, kidnappers and other organized criminal groups. Kidnapping for ransom demands has become a disturbing norm, without appropriate response from the authorities.

For instance, not quite long 30 villagers were abducted in an attack on Tashar Nagule village of Batsari local government area of Katsina State. This comes on the heels of the abduction of 23 people in Kawu community in Bwari Area Council of the Federal Capital Territory on 11 January. Similarly, 50 people, including 36 women were

abducted in an attack on Magizawa community in Kaura Namoda Local Government Area of Zamfara state. Over 400 people were killed in repeated attacks on communities in Mangu Local Government Area of Plateau State including the gruesome massacre of over 200 people in Bokkos and Barkin-Ladi communities in Mangu Local Government on the eve of Christmas in 2023.

Road ambushes have made interstate travel more perilous. Reported incidents such as the abduction of 30 passengers near Katari along the Kaduna-Abuja highway and the kidnapping of 45 passengers in Orokam on the Benue-Enugu route underscore the gravity of the situation. Even homes are no longer safe. Homes in rural communities in Northern Nigeria have for over a decade contended with terror pillages; and more recently, urban centers including the Federal Capital Territory have witnessed a surge in invasions in which citizens are being abducted for ransom even within the confines of their homes.

Failed, by law enforcement, families are resorting to publicly crowd fund to pay ransoms without interference from the government. The reticence of government to this trend is acquiescence to the payment of ransoms. We note that the same government was quick to freeze the bank accounts of donors and recipients of funding for #EndSARS, but fails to take concrete action to protect citizens against organized crime. We are equally dismayed by the willingness of some political leaders and politically exposed persons to publicly support ransom payments; and question their values and alliances. Their actions and utterances reflect lack of faith in the system of which they are guardians, and their nonchalant attitude towards the potential consequences, including directly funding future attacks. We consider that their stance emboldens perpetrators and further erodes the trust of citizens in their government's capacity and sincerity. Obtaining an education has become a risky venture for learners, teachers, and parents due to school abductions. Businesses are also suffering from the effects of this state of affairs. Farming communities are losing their resilience against perennial pillages, and traders can no longer ply roads safely. Foreigners no longer feel safe to visit and invest, and far too many resources that could have been invested in businesses are being paid out as ransoms and fortifying private security.

In case the government has failed to notice, the entire nation is slowly grinding to a halt due to insecurity. We are concerned that the current administration has continued the legacy of failing to decisively deal with the atrocious onslaughts against citizens within the nation's borders, and that Nigerians who are being further impoverished by the escalating insecurity, now perpetually live in fear of being attacked, abducted or killed. The government has continued to fail in its primary duty of ensuring the security and welfare of all citizens as mandated in Section 14(2) (b) of the Constitution and in its obligation to enforce and fulfill its citizens' right to life, according to Section 33 of the Constitution.

We hereby call upon President Bola Tinubu as the lead agent of government to urgently fulfill its constitutional imperative of safeguarding the life of all citizens and declare a state of emergency on kidnapping and other forms of terrorism. The government should in addition as a matter of priority enhance the country's security infrastructure by conducting an audit of the responsibility matrix within security agencies and departments of government bolster their capabilities and deployment of technology to effectively address the evolving challenges of insecurity. The Federal Government should promptly investigate and decisively prosecute all individuals and group implicated in fuelling insecurity while addressing the floundering economy, corruption and human right violations as exacerbating factors of Nigeria's insecurity. The FG should also investigate the financial flow of organized criminal groups and identify their sponsors and beneficiaries. Nigerians are tired of excuses and rhetoric. The time to act is now.