

Why Tinubu Must Name Financiers Of Terrorism

Not unexpectedly, President Bola Tinubu recently gave insight into terrorism financing in Nigeria. The President stated that about 100 terrorism financiers have been convicted in the last two years. He attributed this to efforts by the Office of the National Security Adviser and the Attorney-General of the Federation to target the financial backbone of terrorist groups in the country in line with the National Counter-Terrorist Financing Strategy.

Ordinarily, this should be cheery news but Tinubu's failure to name such terrorism financiers cast doubts about the government's seriousness in rooting out this disease. It is high time the Tinubu administration took decisive steps to name, shame, and prosecute these individuals no matter how powerful or connected they may be.

Islamic terrorism has plagued Nigeria since 2009, leaving behind a trail of death, displacement, economic stagnation, and emotional scars on countless families and communities. Despite the best efforts of the Nigerian military, law enforcement, and local vigilante groups, terrorism continues to thrive, partly due to the secret enablers who fund and sustain it.

These financiers are the invisible architects of carnage, providing resources for weapons, recruitment, and logistics support to terrorist organizations. Unmasking these backers of evil is a critical step in dismantling the infrastructure of terror. It is not enough to reel out numbers pointing to faceless individuals. Nigerians deserve to know those paying for them to die.

To achieve this, the government must strengthen financial intelligence gathering, collaborate with international partners to trace and freeze assets and enforce strict penalties for anyone found guilty of financing terrorism. More importantly, the government must engender the political will to pursue these actions, even when the trail leads to powerful individuals.

It is shocking that Nigerian law enforcement, which often makes public shows of the arrest of petty thieves and internet fraudsters, will keep action taken against terrorism financiers away from the public as it unfolds.

The questions that must be answered are: What are the names of these convicts? When were they tried? In which courts? What sentences did they get? By refusing to name these financiers publicly, the government inadvertently signals that those who aid and abet terrorism can act with impunity.

In February 2022, the Muhammadu Buhari government announced that it had uncovered 96 financiers of terrorism and 424 of their associates/supporters, including 123 companies and 33 bureaux de change operators. Bizarrely, the names of the sponsors and companies were not disclosed. The government had

claimed then that the Nigerian Financial Intelligence Unit had evidence from intelligence exchanges related to terrorism financing on Boko Haram, ISWAP, banditry, kidnapping, and others with 19 countries, yet the details were kept secret.

In May 2022, six Nigerian nationals were found guilty of setting up a Boko Haram cell in the United Arab Emirates to raise funds for fighters in Nigeria. The convicts were convicted in the UAE of attempting to send \$782,000 from Dubai to Nigeria and received sentences ranging from 10 years to life. It is ludicrous that foreign governments can name Nigerians

sponsoring terrorism in Nigeria while the Nigerian authorities shield their identities.

There are deep-seated suspicions that terrorism in the North is partly the handiwork of local elements and foreign collaborators bent on creating ungoverned spaces to allow for the plunder of gold and other minerals. The argument that publicly naming financiers might jeopardize ongoing investigations is valid but insufficient. Keeping their identities secret only emboldens these individuals and allows them to extend their influence even into the corridors of power and undermine efforts to hold them accountable. If Nigeria truly seeks to reclaim its sovereignty from terrorists and bandits, it must show no hesitation in naming and bringing even the most untouchable figures to justice.

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