

Negotiating with Terrorists undermine elements of Nigeria's Statehood

Pro-democracy and civil rights advocacy group HUMAN RIGHTS WRITERS ASSOCIATION OF NIGERIA (HURIWA) has condemned the Federal government for permitting some states in the North-west to negotiate the so-called peace agreement with terrorists, criminal gangs and armed kidnappers just as the Rights group said the negotiations have undermined and eroded the key elements of Nigeria's statehood. HURIWA blames the ambiguities of the Federal government on how to deal decisively with armed brutes killing thousands of Nigerians for the expanding frontiers of terrorist attacks and the unprecedented insecurity in many parts of Nigeria. "Since the Federal Government is creating the impression that it is open to dialogue with terrorists, then more and more desperate criminals would escalate their criminal activities hoping that they too would merit invitation for dialogue by the current administration that is already discussing with terrorists in the North West for the so-called peace. Criminal gang members who are watching the dialogue sessions with terrorists in the North West will automatically become daring and bloody so as to gain attention of the government that is too weak to militarily defeat terrorists and very willing to enter into negotiations for the so-called truce."

HURIWA which expressed the position that any public office holder or private individual who negotiates with terrorists is also a terrorist, has therefore called on President Bola Ahmed Tinubu to stop the disgraceful surrendering of the Nigerian state to the whims and caprices of a motley crowd of armed bandits, bloodstained terrorists, armed kidnappers and criminal gangs in Katsina and some other states in the Northern States of Nigeria. HURIWA said there is no doubt that what have played out in the last couple of weeks in Katsina, Zamfara and other places in the North West of Nigeria in the guise of local and state governments negotiating with terrorists for the so-called truce, amounted to the demolition of the four fundamental elements that qualifies Nigeria as a Sovereignty even as HURIWA postulated that the state as a person of international law should possess the following qualifications: (a) a permanent population (people); (b) a defined territory; (c) government (political authority); and (d) capacity to enter into relations with the other states (diplomat recognition or sovereignty).

HURIWA which condemned the negotiations with terrorists, said the impression being created globally with these charades going on in Katsina by way of negotiations for peace with terrorists responsible for killings of dozens of citizens is that Nigeria has gradually lost those key elements of statehood. HURIWA also stated that the negotiations have completely rubbished the determination of the families of victims of terrorism from achieving any sort of closure and justice for the terminations of the lives of their loved ones and the losses of livelihoods they suffered as a result of terrorist attacks. HURIWA asked rhetorically thus: "Is it not preposterous that whilst the president Tinubu's government has sanctioned negotiations with terrorists that are wanted by advanced and sophisticated nations such as the United States, the same administration sent out the Vice President Kashim Shettima to the United Nations General Assembly in New York to canvass that Nigeria be made a permanent member of the security council of the United Nations? "Is this not a pathetic irony to openly demonstrate to the World that Nigeria's statehood is eroding fast as demonstrated by the show of shame called peaceful negotiations with terrorists who attended the so-called truce meetings in Katsina state wielding some of the most sophisticated weapons of mass destruction and other combat weapons of military grades? Has this government in Nigeria no shame and has the government no respect for the constitution of the Federal

Republic of Nigeria? We insist that terrorists must be made to face the full wrath of justice just as we believe that government is obliged to take justice to terrorists or bring terrorists to justice for their crimes of bloodshed and destruction of livelihoods of Nigerians.

HURIWA recalled that authorities in Nigeria's northwestern Katsina state reportedly struck a so-called peace deal with criminal gangs in what it says is an effort to end years of violence, a government official confirmed to the media. HURIWA recalled that Katsina is one of several states in northwestern and central Nigeria terrorized by criminal gangs that the locals refer to as bandits. The federal government through the Defence Headquarters had previously declared the leaders of the terrorists groups now negotiating with government as terrorists even as huge amounts of money was promised as rewards for information leading to their arrests. HURIWA wondered the logic in negotiating with criminal gangs that continuously raid villages, rape girls and children, kill and abduct residents as well as torch homes after looting them. HURIWA recalled that the terrorists and criminal gangs maintain camps in a huge forest straddling Zamfara, Katsina, Kaduna states in the northwest region and Niger state in the country's central zone and have carried out mass kidnappings of students from schools in recent years. HURIWA recalled that the Katsina State Government confirmed that a dozen bandit kingpins met with local officials and community leaders in the town of Danmusa, where they renounced violence and pledged to turn a new leaf, Nasiru Mu'azu, Katsina state internal commissioner said. "There was a peace meeting between 12 bandit leaders and the local community leaders in Danmusa where the bandits renounced their criminal activities and committed to peace," Mu'azu said. The bandits initiated the meeting, he said. "The community welcomed the overtures and agreed to a peace deal as long as the bandits are genuinely interested in peace," he said. Katsina state government stated that as a mark of goodwill, the bandits surrendered weapons and released 17 hostages, with the promise to free more people they were holding.

HURIWA said security experts have cautioned against any sort of appeasement of terrorists because as criminals with zero ideological leaning, the bandits are motivated by financial gains but their increasing business and operational alliance with jihadists from the northeast has been raising concern among government officials which is the reason for the illegal negotiations with terrorists. HURIWA pointed out that in 2023, Katsina state governor Dikko Umar Radda established Katsina Community Watch Corps, comprising around 2,000 vigilantes to assist the military and police in fighting the bandits "We have been fighting the bandits for the past two years and the state governor has reiterated he will not negotiate from a position of weakness," Mu'azu, the Katsina state official said. In the media statement by the National Coordinator Comrade Emmanuel Nnadozie Onwubiko, HURIWA reiterated its position of zero-tolerance of any sort of negotiations with terrorists because that would amount to state surrender. "We are asking president Tinubu to stop these acts of treason in the name of negotiations with terrorists. We believe that no matter the quantum of cash paid out to these terrorists now dialoguing with Katsina and other Northern governments, the moment the blood money finishes, these terrorists who are already used to making hundreds of millions of blood money will simply return to their familiar terrains of terrorism and when they do return, they would be even more vicious than they are now."