

Nigerians kick against granting amnesty to bandits, terrorists

Some Nigerians have expressed concern over the continued grant of amnesty by the Federal Government to some bandits and terrorists, saying the policy rather worsens the country's insecurity. The people, in a survey by the News Agency of Nigeria (NAN) in the South South region, are of the opinion that pardoning bandits/terrorists questions the nation's sincerity in fighting the heinous crimes. They said that bandits were involved in kidnapping, maiming and killing of innocent citizens and should be prosecuted and punished after arrest, and not pardoned. They said pardoning the perpetrators would continue to encourage the committing of the evils and lead to increase in deaths of Nigerians, deter investors and collapse the economy of the nation. The respondents further said that the consequences of pardoning them would be enormous on the general wellbeing of the nation and the people.

According to Mr Eyobio Okon, a lawyer in Uyo, apprehended bandits and terrorists have to be severely punished so that those who are committing the same crime will be deterred from doing so. He said that in "sane" societies, when someone was arrested by security agencies, the suspect would pass through investigation and prosecution and get convicted. The lawyer, however, noted that there were certain offences which government had prerogative power under the Constitution to pardon the perpetrator, but in the case of banditry and terrorism morality should be considered. According to him, the punishment for such offences is death, and the perpetrators should not be pardoned after killing so many other innocent persons. He questioned the assurance that such pardoned persons would not commit the crime again. Okon however said that it was the right of the federal government to disclose or not the identity of the sponsors of banditry/terrorism in Nigeria.

A legal practitioner in Calabar, Mr Timothy Idege, expressed worry that after losing so many souls to terrorists or bandits, government still considered it wise to grant them amnesty when arrested. According to him the measure tends to



translate to the impression that being civil, responsible and patriotic is useless. Idege noted that Niger Delta militants whom he said, agitated for the development of their region, did not go about killing innocent citizens. "They only said, 'these resources you take from our land should also be used to develop our land,' he added. The lawyer maintained that the consequences of pardoning bandits and terrorists was huge and amounted to encouraging the perpetration of the evil. He added that there would be a continuous economic downturn in the nation since nobody would like to invest in a chaotic society and development would be hampered.

Mr Henry Ekini, National Legal Adviser, Committee for the Defence of Human Rights (CDHR) in Rivers, recommended maximum punishment for those involved in terrorism and banditry to discourage others intending to do so. He said: "As much as the law permits certain authority to grant pardon, crimes that are destructive shouldn't be considered for clemency. "Terrorists and bandits should not be considered for state pardon because their criminal activities run contrary to public policy and interest. "If public interest is directed at eliminating terrorism, banditry and even corruption, then it would be contradictory that government is fighting terrorists and on the other hand granting them amnesty."

Ekini however said despite the fact that it would be wrong for President Muhammadu Buhari to give amnesty to terrorists, the law does not restrict him to do so. "This is so, because by law there is no clear classification of what offences that pardon is to be granted. "But for public confidence and interest, there shouldn't be

consideration for terrorists and bandits; they should be subjected to maximum punishment," he added. He also said it would be wrong for the federal government to reveal the names of perceived sponsors of terrorism without clear evidence. "Where this can be justified is if investigation provides credible evidence by security agencies linking a person to sponsoring terrorism, with the involvement of the court," he said.

On his part, the Bishop of Catholic Diocese of Auchi, Most Rev. Gabriel Dunia, urged government to do everything needed to name and prosecute all the accomplices in the act of terrorism. Dunia said it had become imperative that sponsors of insecurity must be specifically identified; adding that their motives aimed at destabilising the nation. "Insecurity has set Nigeria on the reverse gear. Our Nation has suffered untold hardships and setbacks. "Bandits and other terrorist organisations have had a field day, causing havoc to all citizens of this country either directly or indirectly," he said. Also, a Muslim cleric, Sheikh Momoh Ibrahim, said that Nigerians were tired of hearing about government's plan to uncover the sponsors of terrorism in the country without any arrest or prosecution.

Another legal practitioner, Mike Atemagbon, said that he was worried about the dimension terrorism had taken in the country, adding that there were a lot of laws to deal with it. "We have laws in this country duly signed to tackle terrorism in all forms. "I am referring to Terrorism Prevention Act 2011 as amended, and Terrorism Prevention Amended Act 2013, which spells out who the terrorists are and what punishment is meant for them. A public servant in Yenagoa, Mr Lawrence Emiola, decried the death of innocent Nigerians due to banditry and terrorism, lamenting that the country has become a "battle field." He urged government to gear more efforts towards eradicating terrorism and banditry in the country for the greater development of the nation.