

President Buhari attends Anti-Corruption Summit while innocents are massacred and imprisoned at home

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On 12-14 December 2015, Nigerian armed forces massacred nearly 1000 civilians in an orgy of violence aimed at crippling the Islamic Movement of Nigeria.

The attack, in the northern city of Zaria, targeted supporters of the IMN, their property, religious places and symbols leaving behind a trail of death and destruction.

The IMN leader Sheikh Ibrahim Zakzaky and his wife Zeenat were both shot in the attack and their family home burned down and demolished. Both are currently in the custody of Nigeria's secret services, detained without charge. Three of their sons died in the attack.

Both have undergone several operations to address injuries caused by bullet wounds. Sheikh Zakzaky is also battling to save his right eye, having already lost sight in the left one as a result of the attack. Signs of torture have been seen on his body as well as the corpses of other detainees.

While the army has accused the IMN of instigating the violence by trying to assassinate the Chief of Army Staff, General Tukur Buratai, as he passed through Zaria, the facts suggest otherwise.

According to eyewitnesses who have spoken with IHRC, the army attack was too well organised and too big to be a response to any

alleged threat to the general. Evidence suggests the army was deploying around Zaria well before the general passed by.

The military assault appears to have been pre-planned, highly organised and targeted. During their orgy of violence soldiers targeted the leadership of the IMN and its symbols. They destroyed the Hussainiyah Baqiyatullah which served as the movement's headquarters, demolished the premises housing the tomb of Sheikh Zakzaky's mother and smashed up graves belonging to the victims of another army massacre in July 2014 which led to the killing of 34 civilians.

Photographs from the scene show soldiers not appearing to be under any threat. They can be seen kneeling down in a field and firing at protestors in postures that suggest they were not at any risk of attack.

The violence appeared to have a sectarian character. Eyewitnesses have also reported that during the violence soldiers were seen celebrating and chanting slogans against the IMN, such as 'we have finished with the Shia and Zakzaky' and 'no more Shias in Nigeria'.

Although the IMN has support among Nigeria's Sunnis and Shias it is often portrayed by its detractors as a Shia organisation. Throughout his life Sheikh El-Zakzaky has been a fierce critic of political corruption and malpractice in Nigeria and his

views have seen him imprisoned many times. He is also an outspoken opponent of the Boko Haram movement.

The majority of deaths were caused by gunshots fired by soldiers. Stories have also emerged of people being burnt alive or being hacked to death with machetes and knives. Acts of sordid sexual violence have been reported including cases of rape against women affiliates of the IMN. A 14-year old female witness told IHRC that the military shot her in her private parts when she resisted attempts by soldiers to rape her. Some women reportedly had their breasts cut off and others were deliberately shot in the pelvic region damaging their uteri.

Although the state government in Kaduna has set up a Judicial Commission of Inquiry (JCI), human rights organisations believe it is not sufficiently independent and impartial to be able to hold those responsible to account, nor is there any reasonable prospect of any prosecutions. In fact in his speech announcing the inquiry, Kaduna state governor Malam Nasir el-Rufai listed a range of grievances against the IMN, which is indicative of bias against the IMN from the start. He was also responsible for demolishing IMN properties before setting up the commission of inquiry.

One atrocity that has been confirmed by the JCI is the presence

of a mass grave in which the army buried its victims, presumably to hide the evidence of their misdeeds. The Kaduna state government admitted to the JCI that it presided over the burials of 374 victims in a mass grave shortly after the attack. There is also photographic evidence and eye-witness testimonies of other mass graves where the army is reported to have buried fatalities from the killing spree. Some corpses were allegedly incinerated, apparently in order to conceal any evidence.

On 21 March 2016, IHRC wrote to the International Criminal Court urging it to investigate the massacre. It called on the international tribunal which has a mandate to prosecute people for war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide, to open a preliminary enquiry on the grounds that the crimes committed by the Nigerian army meet all the necessary legal requirements to warrant a preliminary investigation by the ICC prosecutor.

According to information obtained by IHRC some 217 people were confirmed killed in the attacks, another 219 are in detention, and 482 are still missing. The number of

injured is believed to run into many hundreds. IHRC's filing to the ICC is largely based on eye-witness evidence of the army's assault.

The December 2015 attack on the IMN was the second in as many years targeting the movement. On Friday 25 July 2014, a peaceful demonstration in Zaria organised by the IMN in support of Palestinians was brutally attacked by the Nigerian military. Thirty-four people were killed over the course of two days with some dying in custody after being savagely beaten. Nobody has been brought to account for the killings.

Since he assumed office President Buhari has stressed his commitment to upholding the rule of law in Nigeria. However, this commitment would appear to be undermined by the fact that no criminal prosecutions have been brought over the July 2014 or December 2015 massacres and that both Sheikh Zakzaky and his wife Zeenat continue to be held without charge.

In view of the above we believe it is fitting for the President of Nigeria to answer the following questions.

1) If President Buhari really cares about the rule of law, why are Sheikh Zakzaky and his wife Zeenat still in detention without charge?

2) What, if anything, are the authorities doing to ensure those responsible for the crimes committed in the massacres of July 2014 and December 2015 are brought to account for their actions?

3) Doesn't your stated commitment to upholding the rule of law ring hollow when your country's armed forces can run rampant with apparent impunity, massacring civilians including women and children?

4) What has the government of Nigeria to fear from the IMN that it has allowed the army free rein to attack the organisation?

5) Are you worried or even embarrassed that the December 2015 massacre has been referred for investigation to the International Criminal Court?



202 Preston Road Wembley
HA9 8PA
United Kingdom
Tel: +44 2089044222
Email: info@ihrc.org

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