

UK Denounces Execution of Hostages in Zamfara After Ransom Payment

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The United Kingdom Government has strongly condemned the killing of 33 kidnap victims in Zamfara State, Nigeria, despite the reported payment of ₦50 million in ransom. The attack, carried out by armed bandits, has drawn sharp international criticism, with the UK reaffirming its support for Nigeria's counter-kidnapping efforts through collaborative security initiatives.

The victims were executed on Sunday in Banga Town, located in the Kaura Namoda Local Government Area of Zamfara State. The assailants, allegedly led by a known bandit leader identified as Dan Sadiya, had initially abducted over 50 individuals. Seventeen of the hostages, mostly women, were later released following the ransom payment, while the remaining 33 were killed.

In response, UK Deputy High Commissioner to Nigeria, Gill Lever, expressed the UK Government's condolences and called the act an "unspeakable crime" during a press briefing in Abuja on Tuesday. The event, held as part of the State Expansion Programme for the Anti-Kidnap Fusion Cell, was co-organised by Nigeria's National Counter Terrorism Centre (NCTC) and the UK Government.

"Kidnapping damages mental and physical well-being, undermines economic progress, and destabilises communities. It must be stopped," Lever stated. She underscored the broader human and societal costs of such crimes and emphasised the importance of a coordinated response.

Lever highlighted the role of the Multi-Agency Kidnap Fusion Cell, a UK-backed initiative supporting Nigerian security services. The Cell's mandate is to aid the Nigeria Police Force and the Department of State Services (DSS) by gathering and analysing kidnap-related data. This information is shared with the Office of the National Security Adviser (ONSA) to provide up-to-date intelligence on trends and regional threats.

The Fusion Cell is part of a three-year security partnership between the UK and Nigeria, formalised through a bilateral strategic agreement signed by both nations' foreign ministers. According to Lever, this cooperation is grounded in mutual respect and is designed to support Nigerian-led solutions, rather than imposing external models.

Lever also noted that recent discussions in London at a Security and Defence Partnership meeting had led to an agreement to expand the Fusion Cell to the state level. This rollout will enable state-level response teams to work more closely with the central coordination unit and provide commanders with real-time support, enhanced case management systems, and training aligned with United Nations (UN) standards.

The Cell's training programme includes instruction based on the UN Kidnap Manual and aims to equip officers with modern strategies for handling kidnapping cases.

Speaking at the same event, Major General Adamu Laka, National Coordinator of the NCTC, provided further details on Nigeria's strategy. He explained that the Fusion Cell serves as a central hub for intelligence sharing and coordination with the goal of improving operational responses to kidnapping threats across Nigeria.

General Laka identified Katsina, Zamfara, and Kaduna as states most affected by kidnappings and outlined plans for a State Expansion Initiative. This will involve deploying anti-kidnapping liaison officers from both the Nigerian Police Force and DSS to each of Nigeria's 36 states and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT).

"This initiative is intended to bridge the gap between national coordination and state-level action," Laka said. He emphasised the importance of linking federal-level intelligence and planning with the local knowledge and readiness of state-level security forces.

He added that the NCTC, under the Office of the National Security Adviser, remains committed to fostering intelligence-led operations and sustained inter-agency cooperation to protect lives and dismantle criminal networks.

The UK's condemnation and its continued security partnership with Nigeria reflect a broader international concern over rising insecurity in the West African country. Both governments appear focused on strengthening capacity and ensuring a more unified response to the persistent threat of kidnapping.