

PRESS STATEMENT: 5 years of Zaria Massacre, Sheikh Zakzaky still awaits justice (I)

Written by freezak

Sunday, 13 December 2020 15:22 - Last Updated Sunday, 13 December 2020 15:53



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BACKGROUND

As we mark the 5th anniversary of Zaria massacre on 12-15th December, 2020, where Nigerian security forces killed over a thousand of civilians, most of them supporters of the Islamic Movement in Nigeria under the leadership of Sheikh Ibraheem Zakzaky – including men, women and children, it is pertinent we revisit briefly what happened during those black days, its aftermath and the way forward in preventing this genocide into spiraling to another catastrophic security problem for the country.

It was in those two cruel days that many infants and babies that knew nothing about the crimes their parents were allegedly accused of were mercilessly killed. It was during that black period too that even the elderly were not spared. The seventy-year-old elder sister of Sheikh Zakzaky was gruesomely thrown in a raging blaze while still alive, as she cried for water to quench her thirst. It was during that period that many families were completely wiped out of existence. It was during that period that not less than 193 children were butchered without any pity. Over 297 women, 548 men and 23 pregnant women were all killed within those two eventful days in December 2015. Valuable properties worth millions of Naira were torched and vandalized.

Within those terrifying days, graves of martyrs, earlier killed by the same Nigerian Army extra judicially, were desecrated and bodies were exhumed. In those same petrifying days, they secretly buried their victims in mass graves at a location several kilometres away from the crime scene. It was during those days that worship and educational centres, graveyard and the residence of Sheikh Ibraheem Zakzaky were razed and completely demolished.

Sheikh Zakzaky and his wife, Muallima Zeenah, were shot during that deadly raid at their home by the Nigerian authorities, in which three of their children were mowed down in front of their eyes. As of today a total of six of their sons have been killed by the Nigerian Army. The first three were killed by the former regime during the July, 2014 Quds day international protest in Zaria.

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The lopsided Judicial Commission of Inquiry (JCI) they instituted to cover their tracks could not entirely cover up the gravity of these crimes. The Commission had observed the highhandedness of the military, which was not in consonance with their rules of engagement or any known international best practices, and therefore had recommended the trial of the General Officer Commanding (GOC) of the Army's 1st Division Kaduna, Gen. Oyebade, who led the operation and all other officers who participated in the operation, "before a court of competent jurisdiction." Years after, none of these Army officers has been arrested for these heinous crimes and atrocities.

In April 2016, a Kaduna state government official admitted before the JCI that 347 members of the Islamic Movement were dumped in a mass grave near Mando, an area of approximately 1000 square metres. This information should be an important lead for the government to investigate the killings and ensure all those suspected of criminal responsibility are held to account. But until now, the shocking lack of accountability for these deaths has served only to bolster a climate of impunity.

In July 2016, the Kaduna State Commission of Inquiry, set up to investigate the killings, presented its report to the state government indicting the Nigerian military for unlawful killings. In December same year, the Kaduna state government published its white paper on the report, which rejected most of the Commission's recommendations.

5TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE COURT ORDER FREEING SHEIKH ZAKZAKY

Coincidentally this month marks the fifth anniversary of the historic judgement delivered by Justice Gabriel Kolawole of the Abuja Division of the Federal High Court on the enforcement of the fundamental Rights of the illegally detained leader of the Islamic Movement in Nigeria, Sheikh Ibraheem Zakzaky and his wife, Zeenah Ibrahim. Failure to obey that judgement by President Muhammadu Buhari three years on, and counting, makes it one of the worst violations of the rule of law and a monumental abuse of the rights of the couple.

The learned Jurist had rule that the continued detention of the duo violates their rights under Section 35 (1) of the Nigerian Constitution and the provisions of the African Charter on Human and Peoples Rights. Consequently, he ordered the release of the ailing Sheikh and his wife within 45 days of the judgement and that both must be provided with a suitable accommodation and security. The court further ordered the payment of 50 million Naira by the federal

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government to both.

The judge had warned the government in that judgement that holding the Sheikh for so long amounted to great danger, insisting that “If the applicant dies in custody, which I do not pray for, it could result in many needless deaths.” However, Buhari has stubbornly kept deaf ears to that and contemptuously continued to detain them. Instead of releasing them, Buhari opted to file bogus charges against the Sheikh and his wife through Kaduna state government.

This stunning disregard for the rule of law and human rights does not come to the Islamic Movement as a great surprise because Buhari’s utter disregard for court judgements is legendary, and statistics has it that he has disregarded courts in at least 40 occasions since the inception of his government. In the case of Sheikh Zakzaky, the government has at various times proffered different contradictory reasons for its flagrant contempt of court. One of the most absurd of such was the statement attributed to the President himself that national security is over and above the rule of law. By this his warped belief, he has stirred the country towards the path of dictatorship, to which all other well-meaning Nigerians must stand and fight against.

Failure to obey court orders by the government is an open invitation to anarchy as observed by a Professor of law, and this is at variance with the democratic principles it claims to be running. Before arriving at any decision to release any individual or grant him bail, the courts must have first reviewed the facts presented by all parties and listened to arguments from both the government and such citizens. It is therefore totally unacceptable for a government to choose the judgements it would follow and those it will ignore. In the same vein, Senior Advocate of Nigeria once said: “What is national interest that rule of law must be sacrificed for? Rather, it is in the national interest of any government to obey and subject Nigeria to the rule of law. Where there is the rule of law, every interest, including that of the nation is safeguarded. A country without the rule of law is a lawless jungle.”

THE KILLINGS IN THE AFTERMATH OF ZARIA GENOCIDE

As if the blood of the innocent people shed by the Buhari administration in December, 2015 was not enough, the Islamic Movement witnessed further brutal clampdown by the government. The Nigerian authorities have consistently sent in the military to respond to protests or marches by the Islamic Movement. This strategy appears to be at least partly to blame for the bloodshed witnessed these five tortuous years.

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Let us briefly remind the public of the killings by this regime since then:

1) On Tuesday 15-12-15 Mobile police opened fire upon members of the Islamic movement who were staging a peaceful protest demanding the release of Sheikh Zakzaky. On the spot 4 people died, while additional 9 died later due to the gunshot wounds they sustained. Some of them were even electrocuted and stabbed severally while in custody.

2) In August, 2016 a combined team of security agents and vigilantes razed and burned the Islamic centre of members of the Islamic Movement in Jos, Plateau state, and destruction of properties worth millions of Naira.

3) Again on Saturday, 16th October, 2016, a joint force of Police and thugs attacked peaceful members of the Islamic Movement at T/Wada, and Centres of the Islamic Movement in U/Mu'azu, Kinkinau areas. A Muslim brother was gruesomely killed by the thugs.

4) Ten people were killed by police in Funtua, Katsina state on 12/10/2016 while on Ashura procession.

5) 34 people were confirmed killed by the police in Kano on 14/11/2016 while on Arbaeen trek to Zaria from Kano.

6) Two people were killed by police in Kano as Arbaeen trek to Zaria began on 05/11/17

7) Police attacked another peaceful procession with teargas and live bullets that kicked off from Leventis round about along Ahmadu Bello Way, Kaduna, in the evening calling for the release of Sheikh Ibraheem Zakzaky, on Sunday, 7th of January, 2018. They killed 2 persons and injured many.

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8) Shaikh Qasimu Umar Sokoto was shot in Abuja during a free Zakzaky protest on 9th January, 2018, but died on 5th February 2018 of the wounds. So also were 2 others killed during a free Zakzaky protest on 9th January, 2018.

9) 2 people were also killed during free Zakzaky protest in Kaduna on 21 June, 2018

10) Between 27-30th October, 2018 50 members of the Islamic Movement were gunned down by the Army in Abuja.

11) Eleven people have been confirmed killed and at least 30 others seriously injured as the police attack a peaceful Free Zakzaky protest march in the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Abuja on 22/07/2019

12) The Islamic Movement in Nigeria has confirmed the killing of at least a dozen of Ashura mourners from Kaduna, Bauchi, Gombe, Katsina and Sokoto states

13) On 15/11/2019, the Islamic Movement buried one of its members Muhammad Salis who was shot dead by a team of policemen shortly after the yearly Maulud procession that took place in Zaria city to commemorate the birthday anniversary of Prophet Muhammad.

14) The Islamic Movement in Nigeria petitioned the Inspector general of Police over the unwarranted brigandage exhibited by the police command in Kaduna on Saturday 22/08/2020, when policemen were caught on video deliberately burning their vehicle during an unprovoked attack they launched on a gathering of Ashura mourners, ostensibly to put blame on their victims. Not only that they fired live ammunition on the unarmed assembly that included women and children killing 3 people on the spot and injuring at least a dozen and in the middle of the night they burnt 3 houses occupied by members of the Islamic Movement in Hayin Malam Bello neighborhood where they earlier on attacked.

15) Provocative attacks by the police occurred in Zaria and Kaduna after the completion of Ashura processions on 30/08/2020) as heavily-armed security forces came and started shooting at mourners with live ammunition killing two in Kaduna, and injuring many others.

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