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Nigeria: Independent investigation into Maiduguri killings vital

Dozens of men and boys from Maiduguri in northern Nigeria have been reportedly shot by security forces as Amnesty International published a report condemning human rights violations by the security forces in response to the Boko Haram campaign of violence.

Amnesty International has received reports that between Tuesday evening and Thursday morning scores of men were taken out of their houses by the Joint Task Force (JTF) and the younger men were then shot.

According to information received by Amnesty International at least 30 bodies have been deposited at Maiduguri teaching hospital morgue with gun shot wounds.

One eye-witness told Amnesty International that on Thursday she saw dozens of bodies on the floor of the morgue with bullet wounds. Some burials took place on Friday morning.

These reports were received as Amnesty International's Secretary General, Salil Shetty, concluded a high level mission to Nigeria. He had presented the findings of Amnesty International's latest report to members of the government and met with civil society members.

"These reports from Maiduguri are shocking," said Salil Shetty as he prepared to leave Nigeria.

"They underline the importance of Amnesty International's call for thorough investigation into all reports of human rights violations."

"As Amnesty International's report, launched this week, already emphasized, the security services must act within the law. You can't build security through creating insecurity."

Amnesty International met the Attorney General of the Federation following the launch of the report where he, on behalf of the President, made commitments to investigate all reports of human rights violations by the security forces and said that any state actor found responsible will be brought to justice.

Prior to the public launch on 1 November, the findings of the report were shared in a confidential written briefing to the relevant government bodies in August.

It was sent to the Minister of Police Affairs, the Minister of Interior, the Attorney General of the Federation and Minister of Justice, the Inspector General of Police, the Office of the National Security Adviser, the Chief of Defence Staff and the Commissioners of Police for Borno and Kano states.

The document contained an appendix with the details of each case documented by Amnesty International, including the names, locations, the name of the relevant security agency involved, and requesting further information and an investigation into the reports.

The identities of some people were withheld from the final report – a public document with a global readership – to protect their safety.

“As a leading actor on the African and international stage, Nigeria must address the inherent problems with its security forces and show real respect for the rule of law,” said Shetty.

On the same day Amnesty International launched the report, delegates were granted permission to visit Special Anti-Robbery Squad police station Abuja to visit Ibrahim Umar, who remains detained there despite a court order for his release issued in August.

The delegates were told by the SARS police officers that he had been transferred to another station. After their departure, Amnesty International received information that Ibrahim Umar had, in fact, been taken to a different location within the station.

“It looks as though Ibrahim Umar was hidden from us with the express intention of concealing his whereabouts. It would be a significant step if the police could now release this man, respecting the court order,” said Shetty.

“We urge the government to act on its commitment to bring to justice all those responsible for human violations. A vital first step is to introduce a witness protection programme that makes those who are victims of human rights violations feel safe when they call on the police for protection.”