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Nigerian government unleashes massive repression after #endhunger protests

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September 22, 2024



The Nigerian government was clearly very worried by the scale and support for the protests in early August against its anti-human policies of increased fuel prices, higher electric tariffs, unpaid low minimum wages, higher school fees, higher tax rates, higher food prices, higher transport costs and bad governance. They hope that heavy repression will stop future protests against hunger, higher petrol prices and bad governance.

The state tortured dozens and hundreds remain in detention. Some are being held well beyond the constitutional limit of 48 hours before going to court. The High Court in Abuja gave the police a further 60 days for holding over 70 young men from Kano. They are accused of waving Russian flags, that became the symbol of resistance in Kano. This is clearly not illegal in Nigeria.

In Abuja, another 10 people are also being held for the serious crime of treason, incitement to mutiny and levying war against the state. This is despite the complete lack of any evidence for these crimes. They are being represented by Femi Falana who has led and won the defence for four previous treason trials.

The President of the Nigerian Labour Congress (NLC), Joe Ajaero, was detained by the secret police for 12 hours on 9 September 2024 and stopped from attending the Trade Union Congress meeting in Britain. The NLC gained his release by organising for an indefinite general strike. The NLC in their initial press release over the detention of their President correctly said:

We equally demand that the state frees all Nigerians languishing in various prisons around the country for exercising their democratic rights to protest in the #endbadgovernance rallies around the country.

Unfortunately, these other demands were immediately forgotten with the release of Joe Ajaero the same day. Another trade union leader is still being held in prison after being picked up at 2am six weeks ago.

Eleojo Opaluwa, of the electrician's union (NUEE) is being held with nine others in Kuje Prison. They face a range of serious charges including conspiracy to commit treason, inciting to mutiny and organising for a war against the state (each charge carry's the death penalty). These charges arise from alleged organising and participating in the #endbadgovernance and #endhunger protests in early August.

However, the police case is extremely weak, especially as the ten detainees hardly know each other, despite being accused of conspiracy. Five lived in Abuja, but the other five were brought from Kano for waving Russian flags.

Six of the detainees are Muslim and the rest are Christians. They range in age from 21 to 51 years. Five are in their twenties and two are in their fifties. Nine are men

and one is a woman. It would be hard to find a more diverse group of people.

The only thing that appears to unite the five detainees from Abuja is that they were all members of a WhatsApp group that was created on 27 July. They are not all admin members of the group, and some of the admin members have not been accused by the police. There were around 450 members of the WhatsApp group at its height with around 30 having left.

The backgrounds of the five detainees from Abuja are:

- Michael Adaramoye (28 years) was brought up in a Christian family. He attended Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile Ife. Michael is a writer and content creator by profession. He has committed his intellect and youthful energy to contributing to the building of a better society.
- Mosiu Sodiq (29 years) is a young practicing Muslim. He was born and raised in Lagos. He has a diploma from Kwara State Polytechnic, Ilorin. He is a graphics designer and printer based in Abuja where he has lived for more than half a decade.
- Adeyemi Abiodun Abayomi (34 years) is a devoted Christian and family man with a three-year-old daughter. He was brought up in Kaduna and graduated from Ekiti State University (TUNEDIK) with a degree in Computer Science in 2016. He ran Iva Valley Books for the last year.
- Eleojo Opaluwa (50 years) is a Christian from Kogi State. He is married with four children. He is graduate, he also has a master's degree in criminology from the National Open University, Abuja. His first child is at university and the other three are still in school. He is the organizer for the Nigerian Union of Electrical Employees (NUEE) in FCT. He is also Vice Chair of NLC for Kogi State.

- Angel Love Innocent (51 years) is a Christian. She has one 16-year-old son and works in the real estate business in Abuja and has several other business interests.

The names and ages of the five detainees brought from Kano are: Buhari Lawal 21 years; Bashir Bello 21 years; Suleiman Yakubu, 28 years; Abdulsalam Zubairu 37 years; and Nuradeen Khamis 47 years.

The economy in Nigeria has grown well, especially over the period 2000 to 2015. As a result, the GDP is now at least five times larger than it was at the turn of the Millennium. However, all this additional wealth, and some, has been looted by the tiny corrupt elite. The majority of the population are now significantly poorer than they were at the end of the military era in 1999. This growth in poverty has accelerated massively in the last 15 months. This is primarily due to the new Government allowing the price of petrol to shoot up and massive devaluation of the local currency.

The trade unions have a militant tradition, but their action is increasingly not meeting the required demands. As a result, for example, the real value of the minimum wage (which greatly influences all public sector salaries) has halved over the last five years. In 2019, the then new level of the minimum wage could buy 200 litres of petrol. At the end of July this year, when the recent increase of the minimum wage became law, it would only buy 100 litres of petrol. Recent shortages mean it will only buy around 50 litres or less.

The new president of the NLC, the main trade union centre, Joe Ajaero, has called at least half a dozen general strikes since he took up his position in February last year. However, all the strikes were called off before they were due to start or after not much more than a day.

The mass protests at the beginning of August showed the extent of the hunger in the

land. In some places all the young men from a whole community joined massive almost spontaneous demonstrations. This was met with horrendous government repression. Around 40 protesters were murdered by the police and other security forces being shot dead on the protests and tear gas was widely used; perhaps 1,500 arrested and detained with no legal representation or access to the courts.

Millions of Nigerians supported the #endbadgovernance/#endhunger Protests from 1 August. It is this that has upset the government. The police appear to have picked up a random group of people to be punished for the activities of hundreds of thousands – it is obviously beyond the capacity of the Nigerian state to arrest every demonstrator. . We can only hope that all detained demonstrators are found not guilty in the near future.

Many other detainees are being held, especially in the far northern towns and cities from Sokoto in the West, through Kano to Maiduguri in the east. In one court case in mid-September, 37 protesters were released after up to six weeks in jail and 48 were given quite tough bail conditions (paying the equivalent of three years of the minimum wage).

Further protests are being called from 1 October and some local ones are still taking place. Next time these protests need the full support from the NLC. A coalition of the masses in the streets and a robust general strike can easily defeat this government. Then we can begin to see the reduction of hunger, poverty and inequality across Nigeria.

Source: [ROAPE](#)

