



Nigeria: Stories of horror, in their own words

Amnesty International has revealed that since March 2011 at least 7,000 people died in the custody of the Nigerian Military in the north-east of the country after being tortured or of thirst, starvation, disease or the extremely poor conditions of detention.

More than 1,200 others were extrajudicially executed by the Nigerian military since February 2012.

EXECUTIONS IN DETENTION

Damaturu: 'We will pray for our own lives'

Former detainees held in Sector Alpha (Guantanamo) and the Presidential Lodge (Guardroom) in Damaturu, Yobe state, told Amnesty International that soldiers frequently took people out of their cells to kill them.

One former detainee said: "...nearly on a daily basis, they [soldiers] will come and collect some people. At times two, at other times even five and those people will never return to the cell. We were told by some of the soldiers that we had no use to the society, so we would all be wasted [killed], one after the other. So whenever the soldiers come to collect people from the cell, we know their own is finished. We will pray for our own lives."

Screening operation in Bama: 'I saw my son's trousers and then looked at his face'

The military frequently used screening operations and 'pointers' to select Boko Haram suspects. They would gather all men and boys at a central place, tell them to undress and line up. A pointer then decided if they were Boko Haram suspects or not. Babangida Sule (not his real name), a 54-year-old man from Bama, told Amnesty International that his son, 29-year-old Ibrahim Sule (not his real name), was among the 35 men taken away by the military in Bama on 23 July 2013.

Babangida, who was in Maiduguri at the time of his son's arrest, said that on 26 July he went to the Kuru Mohammad military barracks in Bama and saw Ibrahim there.

"They brought him out. There were two of them, he was chained to another. I saw my son. They brought him from the cell. They started asking him questions, told him to sit down. I spent some time in the barracks. They said they would release him after screening."

On Monday afternoon, after prayer, a woman from the Tandari area of Bama came to warn him that she thought she had seen the army with his son. Babangida said: "She told me 'the army has brought these children, they are harassing them, go and see maybe your son is there'. When I went there, I saw people, I took my ID. Some people had put coffin [mats to cover the faces of the dead]. I saw my son's trousers and then looked at his face."

Ibrahim had gunshots in his ribs and head. In total there were eight corpses. Babangida took his son's body home for burial.

CONDITIONS OF DETENTION

Giwa Barracks: 'Welcome to your place of death'

Ahmed Maima (not his real name), a 26-year-old trader and father of two, was detained in Giwa barracks in mid-2013. He told Amnesty International that he was arrested on 2 May 2013 in Gwange, Maiduguri, along with 121 other local men. He said that he was not told why he was arrested, only that the military said "all of you are Boko Haram".

He described what happened after the detainees were brought to the barracks: "They made us lie face down. They beat us with big sticks. Three times each person was beaten on their back. The soldiers said 'welcome to



our die house, welcome to your place of death’.” He spent four months in detention, until his relatives managed to secure his release by paying a bribe. By that time, he said, out of 122 men initially arrested, only 11 survived. He said that more than 1,000 people died in a one-month period.

He said: “Daily they die”. He thought that because of hot weather, they may have died from “no oxygen”. He described how they would see the vomit and have “stools like water”.

Ahmed was interrogated only once, when he had to state the date and location of his arrest. He said that for the entire period of his detention he and others were held chained in pairs, up to 400 people in a cell of approximately 8m by 8m.

“They started to die after three days [after their arrest], more died after one week... In the morning you go and collect small food, breakfast, they open the cell, have breakfast of rice, a small amount, they put it in one hand. Later in the day they give you water once. It is in a jug and you drink and pass it to another inside the cell. In the evening it is rice and stew, small. They give it in a nylon bag. There is no washing, no showers. No sleep. You just sit down only, the place is very tight, just sit on your bottom.”

Ahmed said that several times he was tasked with loading dead bodies of detainees into trucks before they were taken out of the barracks:

“When you come and collect food in the morning, you would see the dead bodies. They bring out the dead bodies and put them outside the cell. ... Detainees load [the corpses] into a car – a big lorry, the one they use for bins, environment and sanitation – BOSEPA [Borno State Environmental Protection Agency]. I had to load bodies. The soldiers just ask ‘who is dead?’”

Giwa Barracks: ‘Sometimes we drink people’s urine’

Saleh Jega (not his real name), a 25-year-old carpenter from Maiduguri, was arrested along with 18 others on 25 November 2012 during a ‘cordon-and-search’ operation in Gwange, and taken to Giwa Barracks. He escaped after more than 15 months when Boko Haram attacked the barracks. He said some days 50 or up to 80 people died, mainly of starvation and thirst. Out of the 19 he was arrested with, only four survived.

“We have a sense that they just want us to die. Many people died in the cells. Any time we were denied water for two days, 300 people died [in those two days]. Sometimes we drink people’s urine, but even the urine you at times could not get. Every day they died, and whenever someone died, we [the other detainees] were happy because of the extra space. And because we will be taken out, to take out the corpses, and the military will give us water to wash our hands and when washing our hands, we drink the water.”

TORTURE

Potiskum: ‘He kept shouting but his voice was no longer loud’

Jidda Ali (not his real name) aged 33, described how one of his fellow detainees died as a result of torture and neglect: “They have a big hole [in the ground] in the corner of this camp where they put people for long hours and even days. ...they put about seven of us into the hole. We met about four other men in the hole as well. There were broken bottles inside the hole and we were put into the hole with only our trousers on. We were barefoot ... They poured cold water on us and at other times they burn polythene and drop the hot melting polythene on our backs. I spent over three days in this hole.

“One of the other men in the hole had blood all over his body. I later learnt he had been there for three days. His hands were still tied behind his back but the skin was peeling off. This man kept asking for water all night. But nobody gave it to him. At one point, one of the soldiers even hit him on his head with a stick for shouting too much. He fell on the broken bottles. He kept shouting but his voice was no longer loud.” The next morning the detainees found that the man had died.

Jidda said that the soldiers then took the corpse to nearby bushes where other dead bodies were lying. After three days in Potiskum, Jidda was transferred to Sector Alpha facility and then released.