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HMIC Alh. Lai Mohammed addresses a Press Conference on plans to return to Lagos - Lekki Toll Gate under the guise of #EndSARS protest.



PERPETRATION OF VIOLENCE UNDER THE GUISE OF #ENDSARS: NEVER AGAIN - FG

Being the text of the press conference addressed by the Honourable Minister of Information and Culture, Alhaji Lai Mohammed, in Abuja on Thursday, 11 Feb. 2021

Good morning gentlemen and thank you for honouring our invitation once again.

2. As you may be aware, some EndSars proponents have given notice of their plan to return to Lagos - Lekki Toll Gate to be specific – on Saturday, February 13th 2021.

The "Occupy Lekki Toll Gate" flyers have been circulating online, with the proponents threatening that "Lagos will burn" again.

3. Let me be clear: While peaceful protests are the constitutional rights of Nigerians, violent protests are not. At this time, the chances that any peaceful protest will be hijacked are very high.

Based on the intelligence at the disposal of the Federal Government, some Nigerian activists have linked up with others outside Nigeria, including subversive elements, with a view to destabilizing the country. We cannot and must not allow this to happen.

4. Never again will the Federal Government allow the kind of violence that was perpetrated across the country under the guise of the #EndSars last October.

Never again will anyone or group be allowed to destroy cities or to kill and maim innocent citizens, including security agents, under any guise.

5. The EndSars campaign last October started as a peaceful protest against police brutality.

As a government that believes in the constitutionally-guaranteed right of citizens to engage in peaceful protests, the Federal Government did nothing to hinder the protests for as long as they remained peaceful.

Not only that, the @NigeriaGov moved swiftly to accede to the five-point demands by the EndSars campaigners which are:

i) Immediate release of all arrested protesters
ii) Justice for all deceased victims of police brutality and appropriate compensation for their families.

iii) Setting up an independent body to oversee the investigation and prosecution of all reports of police misconduct within 10 days.

iv) In line with the new Police Act, psychological evaluation and retraining (to be confirmed by an independent body) of all disbanded SARS officers before they can be redeployed.

v) And increase police salary so that they are adequately compensated for protecting the lives and property of citizens.

6. Unfortunately, despite the acceptance of the demands, the protesters misread the Federal Government's respect for the rule of law and defiantly continued to demonstrate and occupy a public facility, even after a curfew was declared by the Lagos State Government.

This led to a series of actions that culminated in the hijacking of the protests by hoodlums, who perpetrated unimaginable violence in Lagos and other cities across the country.

7. The trillion-Naira destruction of Lagos, in particular, remains too fresh a wound. Hundreds, including the youth, lost their livelihoods to the wanton attacks in Lagos.

The burnt wreckage of public buses that were wantonly set ablaze by rampaging hoodlums remain in their positions as a sad and gory reminder of the unprecedented attacks. The city is still reeling from the war-like destruction.

8. For those who are using justice as an alibi for another round of destruction, let me say this: As we speak, the Judicial Panels of Inquiry, set up across the country to receive and investigate complaints of police brutality or related extra-judicial killings...

...with a view to delivering justice for all victims of the dissolved SARS and other police units, are continuing with the assignments.

In Lagos, the Judicial Panel of Inquiry has an added responsibility of investigating the incident of October 20th at the Lekki Toll Gate.

9. Like we have said many times, anyone who has any information on the alleged shooting or purported massacre at the Lekki Toll Gate, including the names and addresses of those who were purportedly killed, should head to the Panel to give it such information.

This is how to enhance the search for justice, not by rabble rousing or engaging in media shows.

10. However, any further resort to violence in the name of EndSars will not be tolerated this time. The security agents are ready for any eventuality.

A situation in which six soldiers and 37 policemen were murdered in cold blood by hoodlums will not repeat itself. The attack, looting and razing of 269 private and public property will not happen again. The killing of 57 civilians will not be re-enacted.

11. We therefore strongly warn those who are planning to re-occupy Lekki Toll Gate on Saturday to desist. We know that many of those who have been loudest on social media in advertising the plan to reconvene in Lagos on Saturday are not even in Nigeria.

They are elsewhere around the world fanning the embers of violence and inciting gullible people back home. No one should fall for their antics.

12. No government anywhere will allow a repeat of the kind of destruction, killing and maiming wrought by the hijackers of EndSars protests last year.

After all, only one policeman - (plus four others) - was killed in the invasion of the US Capitol in January, yet the FBI has continued to hunt down and prosecute the perpetrators. No life is more important than the other.

13. The Federal Government is also keenly watching the role being played by the various social media platforms in this renewed clamour for violence in the country.

Recall that the social media platforms that eagerly nudged on the #EndSars protesters, until the situation got out of hand, are the same ones that quickly pulled the plug on even their own President when the chips were down in their own country.

I hope we have all learnt our lessons. If we allow them to destroy our
country, we will bear the brunt.

14. Gentlemen, I thank you for your kind attention. I will now take your questions on the issues that I have just addressed.