

**IMPUNITY IN NIGERIA'S SECURITY FORCES: A CASE OF THE SPECIAL
ANTI-ROBBERY SQUAD, 1992-2020**

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Abstract

No society is void of crimes or its perpetrators. In light of this, various governments sought the creation of security units to protect and defend its citizens as well as ensure that law and order is maintained, to achieve cohesive growth and development. The Special Anti-Robbery Squad(SARS) in Nigeria was formed in 1992 to carry out these duties. However, in October 2020, the Nigerian government through the Inspector General of Police, announced the disbandment of SARS. Why? Did the unit achieve its aim? Is today's Nigeria void of such crimes as robbery, kidnapping, etcetera, of which this unit was created to tackle? Before now, particularly in the late 2017, various human rights defenders and activists in Nigeria had launched a massive campaign against this security unit(SARS). This campaign was tagged #ENDSARS, aimed at exposing the various human rights violations committed by the SARS unit. In recent years, the world has witnessed various organisations such as Amnesty International, United Nations and other human right groups draw attention to the constant pervasive use torture, extrajudicial executions, extortions and rape by Officers of SARS. Yet, nothing concrete has been done so far to curb these excesses which seem to gradually diffuse into other security forces in the country. The government has either continued to pay lip services to these problems or simply ignore and threaten media restrictions while these miscreant officers bask in impunity. The study argues that this is hinged on the level of corrupt practices embedded in the Nigerian System

which by proxy, extends to the various institutional outfits in the country. The qualitative method of research was employed in analysing data, gotten from both primary and secondary sources. There is optimism that with the effective implementation of the Anti-Torture Act of 2017; prompt investigation of all allegations of torture/ill treatment and outright prosecution of officials where sufficient evidence of abuse of power abound; standard training, orientation and reorientation of new and old officers respectively; adjustment of salary structures of officers in tangent with the new minimum wage; amongst others, Nigeria is set to witness a rebranded security force who fully understand their objective towards service and are justifiably conscious of creating a safe and secure environment for everyone living in the country.

Keywords: Impunity, Security forces, Police brutality, Injustice, SARS.

Introduction

The Nigeria Police Force (NPF) was one that came into existence in 1930. The subsequent years that followed saw the NPF handle every case of civil crime including anti-robbery. However, from 1984, anti-robbery units existed separately as part of different States' Criminal Investigation Departments. Other special units, which went by different names at different times, included the Intelligence Response Team, Special Tactical Squad, Counterterrorism Unit and Force Intelligence Unit, formed to tackle rising violent crimes following the end of the Nigeria-Biafra War in 1970.ⁱ By the early 1990s, armed robbers and bandits were terrorizing Lagos and parts of Southern Nigeria. Police officer Simeon Danladi Midenda was in charge of the Anti-Robbery Unit of the Criminal Investigation Department in Benin, Southern Nigeria, at the time.ⁱⁱ He recorded some success in combating armed robbery, earning a recommendation from the then inspector general of police. With crime on the rise in Lagos, Midenda was transferred there and tasked with uniting the three existing anti-robbery squads operating in the former federal capital into one unit in a bid to break the stronghold of armed gangs. As the new sheriff in town, equipped with 15 officers and two Peugeot station wagons, Midenda formed an amalgamated unit and named it the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) in 1992.ⁱⁱⁱ In the early days of the unit, combat-ready SARS officers operated undercover in plain clothes and plain vehicles without any security or government insignia and did not carry arms in public. Their main job was to monitor radio communications and facilitate successful arrests of criminals, armed robbers and handle other serious crimes. For about 10 years, SARS only operated in Lagos, but by 2002, it had spread to all 36 states of the federation as well as the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja.^{iv} It was counted as one of the 14 units under the Nigerian Police Force Criminal Investigation and Intelligence

Department. Its mandate included arrest, investigation and prosecution of suspected armed robbers, murderers, kidnappers, hired assassins and other suspected violent criminals. Emboldened by its new powers, the unit moved on from its main function of carrying out covert operations and began to set up roadblocks, extorting money from citizens. Officers remained in plain clothes but started to carry arms in public.^v

It has been argued that one of the main challenges of the civilian government which came to power in Nigeria in 1999, after the election of Olusegun Obasanjo as Head of State, was to ensure the respect and protection of human rights as both the Nigerian Armed Forces and the Nigeria Police Force had been responsible for numerous human rights violations during the previous period of military regimes. This challenge has coincided with a wave of crime and violence that had spread throughout Nigeria over the past years. Police patrols often find themselves fighting against heavily armed gangs of robbers and dozens of police officers have been killed in these encounters. While the police force is understaffed, badly equipped and insufficiently trained, the Nigerian security forces bear an important responsibility in this crisis: the high degree inefficiency, linked to a large extent to high levels of corruption within the Nigeria Police Force is in part responsible for their poor performance in law enforcement duties; alongside, allegations of human rights violations committed by the Nigerian police are numerous. Police action has been particularly gruesome in their fight against crime. The proliferation of anti-crime operations by the federal police appear to have resulted in extrajudicial executions, deaths in custody, acts of torture and cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment in police detention centres throughout the country. General public concern over crime has increased the pressure on the police to arrest as many armed robbers as possible. But this outcry by the population has also been used by the Nigerian Police to systematically justify human rights violations as being an unavoidable part of this fight against crime. The poor performance of the Nigerian Police in effectively tackling crime and the sense of mistrust which they inspire among Nigerians have facilitated the creation of armed vigilante groups at local and state levels, with the tacit, and sometimes explicit, endorsement from some state governments and state houses of assembly and wide popular support. These groups routinely carry out summary executions, unlawful detention and inflict torture and other cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment on suspected criminals.^{vi} Over time, the NPF has been implicated in widespread human rights abuse, extrajudicial killings, torture, arbitrary arrests, unlawful detention and extortion.^{vii} The SARS for instance, allegedly moved on to targeting and detaining young men for cybercrime or being “online fraudsters”,

simply on the evidence of their owning a laptop or smartphone, and then demanding excessive bail fees to let them go.^{viii} This paper argues that such blueprint of extortion, human right abuse, extrajudicial killings which the SARS units were known for has gradually found its way into other security units in Nigeria such as the Nigerian Armed Forces, Nigerian Security and Civil Defence Corps, Nigerian Immigration Services, among others. It attempts to proffer solutions that would ensure efficiency in Nigeria's security forces generally. Data gathered were interpreted before analysis was drawn descriptively. The work is organized in six themes. The first examines the SARS unit and its route towards extinction. The second attempts an assessment of SARS. The third theme recounts Nigerians and their testimonies with SARS officials. The fourth highlights the plausible reasons for SARS failure/inefficiency; while the fifth theme discusses the dangers of imitating SARS-like operations by other security outfits in Nigeria.

SARS: The Journey Towards Extinction

In retrospect, 2006 and 2008 respectively, saw presidential committees propose recommendations for reforming the Nigeria Police generally and in 2009, the Nigerian Minister of Justice and Attorney General of the Federation convened a National Committee on Torture to examine allegations of torture and unlawful killings but made little headway. In October 2010, the then Nigerian President, Dr Goodluck Jonathan, allocated 71 billion naira (\$196m) for police reforms. In 2016, the Inspector General of the Nigeria Police Force announced broad reforms to correct SARS units' use of excessive force and failure to follow due process. Reports of human rights violations committed by SARS have continued to mount, despite repeated promises of reform and accountability by the Nigerian government. Finally, in 2017, Nigerians launched a social media campaign with the hashtag #EndSARS to document abuse and extortion by SARS officers and demanded the total overhaul or disbandment of the unit. Promises from government flowed in again. In December 2017, the inspector general of the Nigeria Police Force announced plans to reorganise SARS units.^{ix} A press release was made through the Nigerian Police Force website^x which outlined the following:

The Nigeria Police Force has observed the recent trends of event in the Social Media on the #ENDSARSNOW and the controversy being generated by the innuendos from the allegations and other misconceptions as it concerns the Operational roles and activities of the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS), a detachment of the Nigeria Police Force.

2. Undoubtedly, the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) have been doing very well in fighting violent crimes such as Armed Robbery, Kidnappings and Cattle Rustling in the country in the recent time and this has resulted in drastic reduction of incidents of the mentioned violent crimes nationwide.
3. However, the Inspector General of Police, IGP Ibrahim K. Idris NPM, concerned with public interest and the need to reposition the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) for more efficiency and effective service delivery to all Nigerians and ensure that the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) operates based on International Core Value of Policing with integrity and make sure the rule of law prevails in the operations and activities of the outfit, the IGP has directed the immediate re-organization of the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) nationwide and instant investigation into all the allegations, complaints and infractions levelled against the personnel of the Special Anti Robbery Squad across the country by the IGP X-Squad of the Force.
4. In the new arrangement, a Commissioner of Police is now the overall head of the Federal Anti-Robbery Squad nationwide under the Department of Operations, Force Headquarters Abuja.
5. The Police Zonal Commands, State Commands and Divisions will continue to operate anti-crime units/sections, crime prevention and control squads and teams imperative to prevent and detect crimes and criminalities in their Area of Responsibilities, and other crack squads necessary to sustain law and order and protection of life and properties in their Area of responsibilities (AOR).
6. Federal Anti-Robbery Squad (FSARS) will now exist and operate in the State and Zonal Commands under the Commissioner of Police (F-SARS) at the Force Headquarters. A Federal SARS Commander of a Rank of Chief Superintendent of Police (CSP) and not below Superintendent of Police (SP) will be in charge of FSARS in State and Zonal Commands across the Country. All Commissioners of Police have been directed by the Inspector General of Police to comply with this directive with immediate effect and warn their personnel not to pose as SARS operatives. The IGP X-Squad has been mandated to go round the Commands and Police Formations nationwide to ensure strict compliance and apprehend any erring police officer.
7. Furthermore, a new training program to be organized by the Force in collaboration with some Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), Local and International NGOs, and other Human Rights Organizations on core Police Duties, Observant of Human Rights and Handling, Care and Custody of Suspects

have been directed by the Inspector General of Police for all Federal SARS personnel nationwide with immediate effect.

8. However, aggrieved members of the public who have any complaint in the past or present of violation of their rights by any Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) personnel anywhere in the country are to report through any of the following channels for investigation and further actions (IGP X-SQUAD 0902 690 0729, 08078662130, 08174041000 – CALLS).

On August 14, 2018, the Acting President, Professor Yemi Osinbajo ordered the Inspector General of Police (IGP) Ibrahim Idris, to restructure the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) unit. He gave the order after receiving several complaints. The reasons for this overhaul bothered on the persistent complaints and reports on the activities of SARS that border on allegations of human rights.^{xi} According to Ogbette *et al*^{xii}, their new activities would be: To conduct their operations in strict adherence to the rule of law and with due regard to international humanitarian law; to ensure that their activities will be intelligence-driven; the unit will also be restricted to the prevention and detection of armed robbery and kidnapping, and apprehension of offenders linked to the stated offences.^{xiii}

In the same year, the Inspector General of Police, Ibrahim Idris, in a bid to address the situation ordered members of the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) to wear police uniforms with full identification, pending the launch of new FSARS uniform.^{xiv} The overhaul of FSARS operatives had been ordered to desist from attending to civil or commercial matters henceforth and focus strictly on armed robbery and kidnapping cases only. Human rights desk had been created in the 36 states of the federation and FCT under the supervision of Habiru Gwandu (Commissioner of Police in charge of FSARS) and the desks was to address cases of infractions against members of the public by FSARS personnel across the nation. The Police will henceforth engage the services of psychologists and counselors in the ongoing screening of FSARS operatives.^{xv} On September 5 2018, IGP Idris restated the ban on SARS operatives from conducting stop and search raids. The Inspector-General of Police Ibrahim Idris, repeated his warning to Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) to stop indiscriminate search of citizens. Mr Idris reportedly issued the latest directive at a training organized for SARS operatives in Anambra State. In his words; “you are barred from searching handsets and laptops of innocent citizens, unless the search is directly linked to a case or directed by IGP or any person or persons he so delegated”.^{xvi} This was through Amaechi Elumelu, the national coordinator of x-Squad. Officers are to stop keeping suspects in perpetual custody without filing court charges, saying they now have

a maximum of two days to take issues to court. Henceforth, any FSARS officer who detains any suspect beyond 48 hours without recourse to the court risks dismissal.^{xvii} Despite these attempts, allegations of abuse by SARS agents continued throughout the years. The Special Anti-Robbery Squad, has for decades been a notorious unit of Nigeria's police force accused of unlawful arrests, profiling, torture and even extrajudicial killings. In October 2020, mounting anger over the alleged killing of a man by a police officer drove thousands to the streets across Nigeria to protest against police brutality, in the biggest demonstrations to sweep the country in years.^{xviii} The resurfaced EndSARS demonstrations came with massive support from the international community. This led to the disbandment of the SARS unit on 11th October, 2020 and the establishment of the Special Weapons and Tactics Team (SWAT) on 13th October – two days after the end of SARS. The notions that the new unit will be a replica of SARS, fuelled more youth-led protests, mobilised under the #EndSARS slogan, continued even after the government formally scrapped SARS and pledged reforms. However, these protests ended abruptly after the (alleged) deadly shooting of unarmed protesters on October 20 in Lagos's Lekki toll gate by the Nigerian Army.^{xix}

Assessment of SARS Activities in Nigeria

SARS' impact cuts across both negative and positive lines. While some believe the unit performed well enough and aided the arrest of uncountable notorious criminals, others believe the ills of the unit overrides its merits. There were quite a good number of benefits that came with SARS. The arrest of the notorious kidnapers such as Onwumadike Chukwudumeme (Evans) and Henry Chibueze (Vampire) was one that came with so much accolades to the SARS unit. It is on record that these notorious individuals orchestrated the kidnap and killing of so many Nigerians through the years until the SARS unit caught up with them and brought an end to their inhuman activities in the country.

Mohammed^{xx} posits that in 2015, due to the unabated activities of cultists and other violent crimes, including kidnapers and armed robbers in Edo State, the Inspector General of Police (IGP) Idris, dispatched a special crack squad comprising SARS officers to the state to tackle the situation. The situation was, few days after, brought under control. Records show that, SARS has been able to arrest more than three thousand suspected kidnapers across the country and in fact, the recent successes recorded in reducing the high rate of crime and criminality, especially kidnapping and other deadly vices in most parts of the country, is largely the handiwork of SARS operatives.

The Abuja-Kaduna Highway has become a danger zone as kidnappers and armed robbers have taken over the route in recent times, especially after the disbandment of SARS. Many prominent Nigerians were kidnapped and robbed on a daily in the area. Such gruesome activities were stalled a bit especially from 2001 up through 2018 because of the immense activities of SARS operating on the highway at the time. Some scholars like Mohammed^{xxi} and Ogbette et al^{xxii} agree that not all the alleged wrong doings attributed to the SARS personnel are actually committed by them. They believe that many bad elements have been arrested in recent times for impersonating or claiming to be SARS personnel, while carrying out unscrupulous acts.

Be that as it may, the unit has also been indicted for acting notoriously over time beyond their responsibilities and mandates without checks. This apparently led to the massive clamour and eventual disbandment of the unit in 2020. SARS as we had it before the recent disbandment seem to have created space for external influence through the power of money. It does appear that people with the financial strength used their money to control some SARS officials (the bad elements within the unit) by telling them who to arrest, slap, harass and so on, thereby, drifting from the initial purpose(s) which the Unit was created for. In Nigeria, it seemed like young men can't move around freely with a starched shirt, flashy nice wrist-watch, a portable nice phone (like iPhone) and car without being harassed and extorted for dressing fine. In the most recent time in Nigeria, living well by changing cloths and cars seemed to be a big crime before the SARS personnel. They already have this perception that when you live fine that means you are a *yahoo boy* (fraudster), not taking into cognizance the fact that there are greater number of Nigerians who are really doing well in their different businesses and career endeavours. It was alleged that at some time if you got arrested caught up by some officers (SARS), you shall be asked to pay reasonable amount of money to their account but if you are not, you may be shot, jailed, robbed or framed up.^{xxiii}

In September 2016 and most recently in 2020, Amnesty International (AI) following the trail of widespread complaints by Nigerian citizens, published a report indicting the Special Anti-Robbery Squad of subjecting its detainees to dreaded torture in form of hangings, beatings, rape, extortions, humiliation, shootings, and mock executions. The facts appear salient in today's world, where Human Rights activism takes centre stage.

An Encounter with SARS: A Tale by Nigerians

Testimonies and accounts of Nigerians paint a gory picture of abuse, by the SARS unit, where ill-treatments, torture and intimidation remain routine practices in

detention centres. Historical data from credible sources highlights such cases of SARS abuse through the years from both victims and eye witness accounts.

In February 2017, 23years old Miracle Onwe on allegation of laptop theft was arrested, detained and tortured at the SARS detention centres in Awkuzu and Neni in Anambra state for 40 days, before he was charged and brought before a court. In Miracle's words to Amnesty International;

At SARS Awkuzu ...their leader directed them to hang me. They took me to the back of the hall and tied me up with ropes. They tied my hands behind me, tied my two legs together and then tied the rope binding my hands with that around my legs behind me, causing my chest to protrude. They had two, already prepared iron stands where they hang people. They passed an iron rod through the ropes and then lifted me up by the rod and hung me from the iron stand. Then they started to use all manner of items to beat me, including machetes, sticks, inflicting me with all manner of injuries... When the first officer came to check and saw that I was almost unconscious, he went to call their team leader, who then asked them to bring me down. They dumped me inside the interrogation hall...^{xxiv}

The next day, he was taken from Awkuzu to a SARS detention centre in Neni, where he was detained for 40 days. He said he was denied food and water by SARS during the course of his detention, and only managed to stay alive with the help of inmates who smuggled sachets of water into his cell at midnight. He alleged that eight of his co-detainees died of starvation during the period of his detention. Miracle was taken to court on 25 March 2017 and charged for armed robbery, but was discharged for lack of evidence. It was gathered that the lawyer who took up the case of Miracle, wrote the Inspector General of Police (IGP) in May 2017 asking for an investigation, but failed to get any response from the IGP.^{xxv}

Elijah Balogun relates his extortion experience with SARS in a tweet. According to him "SARS stopped the Uber cab my friend and I were riding in April this year (2018). They told us to come down. Started asking for our phones and threatened to take my friend away because he has beard and looks like a G boy (fraudster). Lastly, they begged us to drop 'something'^{xxvi}

Sunday, a student of the University of Ibadan, narrated his experience with SARS officials in a tweet. He shared how he was beaten by SARS officers for a crime he knew nothing about. In his words, "Early in the morning while I was still sleeping, SARS officers broke into my house, I was beaten, molested and arrested because

someone in my neighbourhood allegedly committed a crime. I spent twelve days in their custody and released after paying a huge sum”.^{xxvii}

In Collins Ezenwa’s case, he was an ex-police officer who was accused of armed robbery and kidnapping by the police and was executed on 27th January, 2017 in Owerri, Imo State by SARS. Two months after the death of Collins, it was gathered that the police arrested four of his relatives and extorted various sums of money from them. One of the relatives, a 48-year-old trader, revealed that he was arrested in his village in Imo State and taken to Lagos, where he was detained for two weeks. He paid the sum of one million naira to the police before he was released.^{xxviii} Furthermore, another police unit, the Intelligence Response Unit (IRT) illegally confiscated family assets(cash, buildings and business assets). According to Collins’ wife,

“All our vehicles have been unlawfully confiscated by the police and converted to their personal use... I saw one policeman using my car and... was driving the Sienna my husband gave his cousin... Our hotel has been taken over by the police. I was informed that our Prado jeep is being used by SARS for patrols. Our hotel is currently managed by someone appointed by the police and he renders account to the police. The hotel makes a cash turnover of about N12m every month. To ensure that I have nothing, the police went to a furniture shop at New Haven where my husband made a cash deposit of N2, 200,000. 00 for a set of house furniture and retrieved the money from them... One of my brothers was arrested and everything of value he had, including money was taken by the police... The police have also stopped our tenants from paying rent to me. I have absolutely nothing. The police IPO warned me to cooperate with them and comply with their instructions and not to involve lawyers in my discussions with them. He said that he knew that I was innocent, but my husband made billions within two months, that I married him for his money. That my husband must have been a kidnapper or stumbled on money, but that men who stumble on money do not display wealth like he (my husband) had done... One policeman advised me to cooperate and work with the police, so that the police would give me “something” (a token) from my late husband’s estate; that when police kill men like my husband “they must collect” (make money) or make sure that everything is wasted.”^{xxix}

Amnesty International^{xxx} confirmed that there was no judicial order authorising the police to confiscate Ezenwa’s property until 22 September 2019, much later than the date on which the police had illegally confiscated it. Investigations into

the case further showed negligence since none of the officers who were involved in Ezenwa's killing was neither removed from their duties nor prosecuted.

Nkyjoye, an alumnus of the University of Benin, also narrated his encounter with SARS officers, thus, "I had same experience in 2011 when I was in UNIBEN. I went out with my friends. About 10pm on our way home, they stopped our car, asked my friend who was driving to unlock his phone and he refused. So they took us to the station and laid allegations that we were kidnappers. We slept in their station and the next day was an environmental. It was crazy."^{xxx}

A blogger who identified himself as *Ladi*, while relating his experience, shared that he was threatened while attending a conference in 2017. He recounted that on "this fateful day..., I was to attend the Lagos Digital Summit. I took a taxify from the office to the venue and met them around Sheraton Link Road. They stopped the cab and asked me to come down. Asked me to identify myself which I did and asked for my ID card and Complimentary Card which were unavailable. They threatened to arrest me but my saving grace was because my mum was in the police before she passed on so as they were threatening me to settle them if I don't have a ID, I was also threatening them with dismissal via a secret camera which was live and on me. After about 3hours, I was allowed to go but not without calling my Uncle who is a commodore in the Nigerian Navy"^{xxxii}

Samuel Eke, a 25-year-old trader, told Amnesty International that he was arrested by SARS officers at a bar in the Okpoko area of Onitsha on 14 May, 2018 at about 7pm and detained for three days at a police station in Onitsha. He said that the same officers also arrested 35 other young men, who were detained with him. According to the victim, "they accused us of being cultists (gang members) and demanded that everyone pay the sum of N10, 000. Most of the detainees' relatives paid and they were granted bail. I was released on the third day, when a human rights activist intervened on my behalf."^{xxxiii} Amnesty International^{xxxiv} gathered that the human rights defender who worked on the release of Samuel Eke revealed that between January 2018 and October 2018, he had intervened in the arrest of at least 70 young men between the ages of 16 and 30. He said most of the victims were picked up on the street, from a football viewing centre or a bar. They were often accused of being gang members and asked to pay money for bail.

Plausible Reasons for SARS Failure/inefficiency

There are several factors that contributed to the failure of SARS as a police unit. However, this paper focuses on three major factors which include - Non-

accountability of the unit, inefficient regulatory body to serve as a check, and failed reforms.

Non-accountability of the Unit: In retrospect, shortly after Amnesty International^{xxxv} launched its report on SARS in 2016, the police authorities promised to investigate all the cases detailed by the organisation and bring to justice the SARS officers responsible for torture and other inhuman and degrading treatment. Calls were put across to the IGP by parties of interest on such dehumanizing abuse of power why the SARS unit.^{xxxvi} In fact, on 12 October 2016, a coalition of 23 human rights organisations and lawyers called for the investigation of a senior police officer and the head of SARS Awkuzu, for human rights violations allegedly committed by officers of SARS, Awkuzu.^{xxxvii} Research shows that no SARS officer was brought to account for these human rights violations in all the cases documented in this report.^{xxxviii} It was later gathered that Amnesty International wrote to the Inspector General of Police (IGP) on three occasions between November 2018 and August 2019, asking for steps the police took to investigate the cases and also requested to meet with the IGP to discuss the reforms in SARS, but received no response. The senior police officer who was alleged by human rights organisations to be responsible for serious human rights violations at the SARS station at Awkuzu was merely transferred to another unit and was made an adviser to a state government on security matters. Another senior police officer who allegedly ordered the torture of a trader and allegedly extorted N6 million from him was allowed to retire in December 2018, after he returned the money to the victim. He was not prosecuted for the alleged crime.^{xxxix}

Through time, many victims of SARS' alleged violations continue to face unnecessary threats from police authorities and SARS officers especially while they make attempt at seeking justice. Again, the poverty level in the country has made it impossible for so many of such victims to seek or access quality legal representation. The few who make it to the courts are face with prolonged court cases. They more often than not back away from such cases due to lack of financial resources or discouragement. Accountability in most of such cases appear non-existent and the possibility of instituting criminal prosecution of indicted SARS officers are slim.

Inefficient regulatory bodies to serve as a check on the unit: Internally, the Nigeria Police established several mechanisms to regulate the conduct of their officers and men. The public can report misconduct by the police to the Police Complaints Bureau, an internal investigation unit established in 2003. The Bureau is supposed to have an office in each police station. Complaints against the police

are reviewed by the 'Orderly Room Trial', an additional and separate mechanism. The orderly room trial is an internal police review mechanism mandated to recommend disciplinary action against a police officer found wanting, if there is evidence of professional misconduct. However, being an internal body based on peer review by colleagues, it lacks the independence and impartiality required to be an effective oversight measure.^{xi}

In November 2015, the police authorities launched the Complaint Response Unit (CRU) to process complaints from the public. However, the Unit has not been able to follow through with prosecution against a single SARS officer for torture. Many human rights defenders revealed to Amnesty International that the Unit is reluctant to investigate cases against SARS.^{xii} Some described the Unit as a mere public relations gimmick by the police.^{xlii xliii} Even the Police Service Commission (PSC) which was set up by the Federal Government and given the empowered to formulate policies and guidelines concerning appointment, promotion and discipline of officers in the NPF; "appoint, promote, discipline and dismiss all officers of the Nigeria Police Force (NPF) except the Inspector-General of Police (IGP)", cannot refer cases to the courts for prosecution. Complaints made to the PSC are referred back to the police for further investigation.^{xliv}

The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) on 13th June 2018 had announced its approval to audit the detention facilities of the police, including SARS in a bid to oversee the human rights situation in the country. By 4th November 2020, the Commission gave a press release through the Executive Secretary, Tony Ojukwu Esq. noting that the activities of the defunct SARS have impacted negatively on the enjoyment of human rights of some citizens who also encounter difficulties in seeking justice for the violations of their rights by SARS, thereby making them suffer double jeopardy.^{xlv} Although the Commission(NHRC) indicated strong commitment in collaboration with the Nigerian Bar Association, to assist any person with complaints of human rights violations against the defunct SARS and other tactical units of the NPF at the sittings of the Independent Investigative Panel(IIP), one could argue that in reality, the perpetrators are rarely held to account.

Failed Reform Attempts: Through the years, various administrations that have graced the seat of leadership have made attempts to reform the police with little or no progress. In 2006 and 2008 for instance, two Presidential Committees proposed recommendations on how to reform the Nigeria Police. The 2008 Presidential Committee concluded that "various efforts made by successive governments to find out the causes of the inefficiencies of the Force have not been

successful, because the same governments failed to implement the recommendations of their own panels and committees.”^{xlvi} The Federal Government adopted a White Paper in 2008 in which it accepted the recommendation to set up an Implementation Task Force, to implement all recommendations and prioritise and allocate the funds needed. In October 2010, former Nigerian President, Goodluck Jonathan announced that the government had earmarked N71 billion for police reforms. He asked the NPF to double its efforts “by demonstrating a high level of integrity and commitment in the discharge of their duties.” A review of the Police Act (1990) began in 2004; a draft bill has been pending before the National Assembly since October 2006. On 18 March 2020, the Nigerian Senate, held a public hearing to receive memoranda on the Police Act (Repeal and Re-Enactment) Bill 2020 (SB181), which would repeal the existing Police Act. Amnesty International Nigeria submitted a memorandum raising serious concerns about the Bill, with regards to excessive powers of the police in policing assemblies, accountability mechanisms for violations, among other things. Furthermore, the Police Force has not enforced effectively, laws, regulations and codes of conduct to protect human rights.^{xlvi}

In 2009, the Minister of Justice and the Attorney General of the Federation established a National Committee on Torture “to investigate allegations of torture, extrajudicial executions and other unlawful killings.” However, the Committee is grossly underfunded. On 20 September 2017, the police launched the Force Order 20, which created Police Duty Solicitors, who are to be available at every police station throughout the country. These solicitors are responsible for providing arrested and detained persons with legal advice and other legal services. The Force Order also sets out the mode of operation of the solicitors. In theory, the Force Order 20 makes it possible for suspects to access legal assistance for free, at the point of first contact with law enforcement. However, two and half years after the launch of the scheme,^{xlvi} On 14 August 2018, the Inspector General of Police announced what he called “immediate overhauling of the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS)”, to address complaints and allegations of human rights violations leveled against SARS officers by members of the public. Among the measures announced by the police chief are the creation of a human rights desk in police state commands, the restriction of SARS officers to the investigation of robbery and kidnapping cases. Also, in the new arrangement, a Commissioner of Police is now the overall head of the Anti-Robbery Squad nationwide, under the Department of Operations, Force Headquarters, Abuja.^{xlvi}

As a result of the nationwide protests in October 2020 by the youth, the government directed state authorities to set up panels to investigate alleged human rights violations by police units. The police had pledged disciplinary actions on unprofessional officers of the unit, and shared her intent to train officers on humanitarian laws and human rights, most especially in relation with the use of force, arrest and detention, among others. Yet nothing meaningful has become of such promises or the panels, and most of the parties involved in the cases have either withdrawn due to lack of credence of the said panel or disappointments on the panel approach towards glaring issues.

SARS as a Role Model in other Security Outfits in Nigeria: The Dangers

SARS is known by Nigerians for its brutality and abuse of human right and was revered / feared for this. At some point in Nigeria, one could almost achieve whatever they dime fit from another individual by just threatening to arrest him/her using SARS. Several security units through the years have tried to imitate the modus operandi of SARS in order to be revered like SARS as well. A good example can be drawn from the case of Ahmed, a 31 year old salesman for a consumer goods company, and three of his friends who were returning from a colleague's birthday celebration at midnight on February 5 when their car was stopped by four police officers at Ketu bus stop in Lagos. What initially seemed like a routine check quickly took a turn for the worse. In Ahmed's words, "I parked the car and asked how we could be of help. They said that we flouted lockdown orders; we insisted there was no such thing. Then one of the [police officers] became furious that we were arguing with him." The officers instructed Ahmed's friends to get out of the car. One of them got into the passenger seat and threatened to frame Ahmed for possession of a firearm because he was "disrespectful". Another officer cocked his gun, and told Ahmed: "You think because of End SARS, you have no reason to fear the police? I will waste you and nothing will happen because it is late at night."¹

Several accusations of abuse and extortion have long accompanied the reputation of several other units in the Nigeria Police Force, which was named the country's most corrupt public institution by a 2019 survey, even though the police continue to deny such characterisation. The Nigerian Armed forces and Nigerian Civil Defence officers who mount road blocks on highways are not left out in these extortions and killings. In recent times, the Nigerian Immigration Service and Road Safety officers on highways, borrow leaf from the SARS unit and extort citizens of their hard earn money. The paper strongly argues that the slow and

steady diffusion of these corrupt practices into several other security units came from years of non-effective mechanism to check the police unit in general and SARS unit in particular, from whence these practices appear domicile. It has been rightly argued that the federal government not only is responsible for human rights violations committed by the police; its security forces have also failed to protect Nigerian citizens from human rights violations committed by armed vigilante groups across the country. The implications of this are Nigerian citizens taking law into their hands and engaging in mob actions against security officers, which will in turn lead to complicated scenarios of death tolls and eventual anarchy in Nigeria in near future.

Conclusion

The situation in Nigeria was characterised by waking up almost on a daily basis to the news of extrajudicial executions, inhuman treatment, excessive use of lethal force and cruel acts of torture on alleged criminals and innocent citizens by the Nigerian security forces and SARS in particular. In response to the numerous crimes and havoc caused by some SARS officers in carrying out their duties in the most unruly manner, Nigerians have embarked on series of nationwide protest that invariably led to the disbandment of the unit and the emergence of the Special Weapons and Tactics (SWAT) unit. Despite the unending advocacy to end the new unit-SWAT on the basis that it seems to be a replica of the just disbanded SARS, the anomaly transcends these mentioned units as the human rights violations, extortions, and killings continue to feature in several other security outfits in Nigeria, which seem to have emulated the SARS mode of operation in tangent to the norm.

Therefore, there is need for the Nigeria Security Forces to embark on a total reorientation of these officers on human relations on constant bases. It is believed that this will help the efficiency level of these officers in discharging their duties. It has also become necessary for the Federal Government of Nigeria to set up efficient and effective prosecution unit for officers and men who flout the laws. A public prosecution of these officers, their suspension from service and seizure of salaries of officers under investigation will go a long way to discourage prospective officers that intend to flout these laws.

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