

Weekly Updates on the #EndSARS Judicial Panels of Inquiry – No. 11

25th January, 2021 – 30th January, 2021



The Judicial Panels of Inquiry set up across Nigeria to investigate the excesses of the Nigeria Police Force and other security agencies have continued sittings in the week under review in the following 24 states: Adamawa, Akwa Ibom, Bauchi, Bayelsa, Benue, Cross-River, Delta, Ebonyi, Edo, Ekiti, Enugu, Gombe, Imo, Kaduna, Kwara, Lagos, Nasarawa, Ogun, Ondo, Osun, Oyo, Plateau, Rivers and Taraba States.

On January 26th, the Oyo State Judicial Panel of Inquiry began hearing the 50 petitions it had received over the last two months, while on January 29th, the Rivers State Judicial Panel of Inquiry concluded hearing the 188 petitions it had received.

100 days after the brutal crackdown by security forces on peaceful #EndSARS protesters at Lekki Toll Gate and Alausa in Lagos on October 20, 2020 and brazen attempts to cover up the violence, Nigerian authorities have failed to bring to justice those suspected to be responsible for the incident.

The Nigerian Army has also pulled out of the Lagos State Judicial Panel of Inquiry as more evidence resurfaces confirming that Nigerian soldiers opened fire on peaceful protesters on that day.

The last hearing on January 23 was the third time in a row that the army and its counsel failed to appear before the Lagos State Judicial Panel. This development comes after Reddington Hospital testified to treating victims from the #EndSARS protests with bullet wounds on October 20, 21 and 22.

The Chair of the Lagos State Judicial Panel of Inquiry, Doris Okuwobi, a retired judge, warned that the army would not be able to claim denial of fair hearing when the panel submits its findings to the government. The membership of each judicial panel is largely similar from state to state. The panels are chaired by a retired High Court Judge and the members include representatives of civil society, the police, the National Human Rights Commission, and youth.

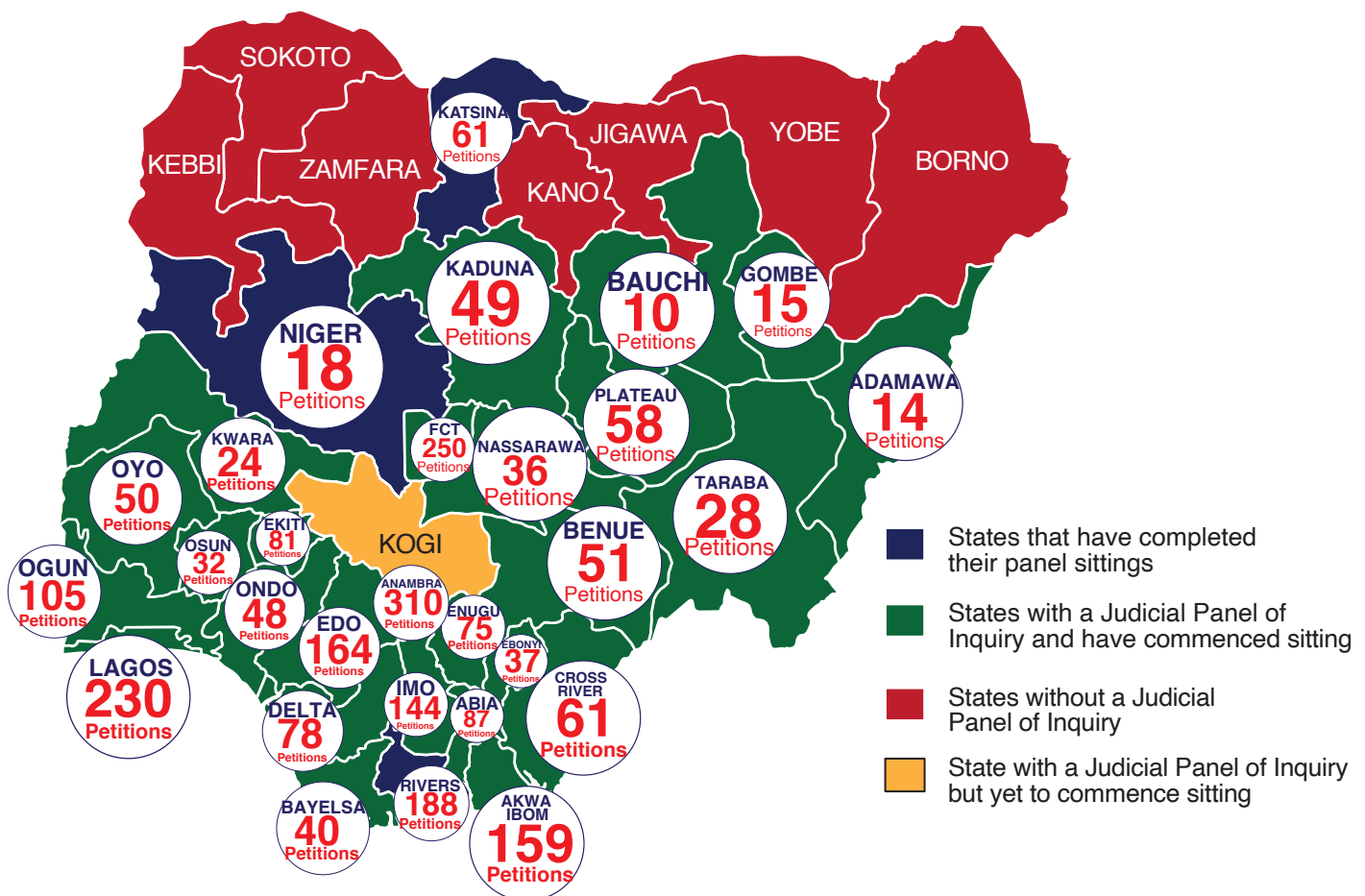
Yiaga Africa and Enough is Enough Nigeria (EiE)'s observation of the Panels of Inquiry will continue to provide information to promote transparency and accountability and build citizens' confidence in the process.

Findings from the period under review include:

1 Petitions Submitted across the Country and Conclusion of Sitzings:

Data from the Panels show the following number of petitions submitted across the country: FCT - 250 petitions, Anambra State - 310 petitions, Edo State - 164 petitions, Lagos State - 230 petitions, Imo State - 144 petitions, Abia State - 87 petitions, Akwa Ibom State - 159 petitions, Ekiti State - 81 petitions, Plateau State - 58 petitions, Cross River State - 61 petitions, Ogun State - 105 petitions, Oyo State - 50 petitions, Enugu State - 75 petitions, Benue State - 51 petitions, Ondo State - 48 petitions, Osun State - 32 petitions, Bayelsa State - 40 petitions, Kwara State - 24 petitions, Nasarawa State - 36 petitions, Delta State - 78 petitions, Ebonyi State - 37 petitions, Taraba State - 28 petitions, Adamawa State - 14 petitions, Gombe State - 15 petitions, Bauchi State - 10 petitions, Kaduna State - 49 petitions.

Niger, Katsina and Rivers States have concluded the Panels with 18, 61 and 188 petitions respectively.



2 More Evidence Presented across Panels of Inquiry:

At the Abia State Judicial Panel of Inquiry, the photograph of a deceased victim of police brutality was presented as evidence by a family member. The deceased was shot and killed by police officers attached to the Cameroun Road Police Station, Aba in October 2020. The deceased had travelled to Aba from Owerri to attend the wake-keeping ceremony of his friend's mother and decided to check on another friend. On his way back, the host friend asked the deceased to meet up at Cameroun Road junction. On getting there, the host saw the deceased in the company of police officers attached to the Cameroun Road Police Station and a corpse in the police vehicle. The police officers then proceeded to shoot the deceased in the leg and eye, claiming he was part of the mob that burnt down the Police Station after the #EndSARS protest. The corpse was deposited at a mortuary by the police.

Other evidence presented across the Panels include;

- Pictures of a damaged car and documents submitted by Sergeant Felix Aderobakin in Ekiti State;
- Clothes worn while being brutalized by the police by a petitioner in Enugu State;
- Medical receipt tendered by the victim of police brutality as evidence of treatment in Plateau State;
- Death certificate of a victim of police brutality in Lagos State;
- Submission of receipts of purchase of TV, motorcycle, phones by Inspector Bohi Blessing in Ekiti State;
- Sworn affidavit from a defense witness in Lagos State;
- Pictures of victims of police brutality in Lagos State.

3 Direction of Media Reports of #EndSARS Judicial Panels of Inquiry – More Positive than Negative

With the setting up of the Panels to investigate cases of police brutality, media reports have focused more on tales of pain by Nigerians who have suffered various degrees of agony as a result of their encounter with men of the Special Anti-Robbery Squad or other police units. This is a positive direction, as the media's coverage of the Panel sittings affirm that one of the demands of the #EndSARS movement - victims given a platform to narrate their ordeals and seek justice/compensation - is being implemented. Some of such reports were published by international media organizations like the BBC, Reuters, CNN and Aljazeera. CNN went the extra mile to make further investigations, and gave a detailed report, even revealing the origin of the bullets found at the scene of the Lekki massacre. Other platforms that paid attention to the setting up of Panels include, Premium Times, The Punch, This Day, Vanguard, Sahara Reporters, The Cable, The Punch. Headlines include; ***Judicial Panel Into Shooting, Police Brutality Convenes in Lagos; End SARS protest: Rinu Oduala, Majekodunmi Temitope go represent youths for Lagos judicial panel of enquiry on police brutality; Inquiry probes shooting of Lagos protesters, police abuses; Benue state joins Lagos, others, sets up judicial panel of inquiry***, amongst others.

The media coverage of the EndSars Movement has been positive. Even though some media houses were initially fined by the NBC, they still report the issues, with headlines that are more favorable to victims than the government.

READ: [EndSARS Movement Through the Media Lens](#)

Yiaga Africa and EiE Nigeria note and recommend the following:

- 1. Non-Establishment of Panels and Refusal to Commence Sitzings:** The refusal to constitute Judicial Panels of Inquiry in Borno, Jigawa, Kano, Kebbi, Sokoto, Yobe and Zamfara States indicate a pattern of response that underlines the Nigerian government's unwillingness to engage in meaningful security sector reform. We note the commencement of sitting at the Oyo State Judicial Panel of Inquiry, which began on January 26th, 2021, two months after its Inauguration. We recommend that the Panel does all in its power to efficiently carry out its duties, regardless of the time lapse. We also note that while the Judicial Panel of Inquiry was set up in Kogi State - the panel has not commenced sittings. Yiaga Africa and EiE recommend that the citizens with cases of police brutality in these states should continue to seek justice through the court system as well as petitions to the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC). We remain committed to supporting the rights of citizens to receive justice for human rights violations against them and their families.
- 2. Inconsistent Panel Sitzings affect Completion of Panel's Assignment:** As the Judicial Panels of Inquiry that have been set up in 29 States and the FCT sit and/or collect petitions, Yiaga Africa and Enough is Enough (EiE) Nigeria note the inconsistency in the sitting of the Panels in some states including Adamawa, Cross River, Gombe, Nasarawa and Taraba States largely due to 'unforeseen circumstances' among other reasons. We recommend that the Panels provide timely information to the petitioners, media, observers, civil society groups and security agencies in the event of the Panels inability to sit on its set dates. In the same vein, Yiaga Africa and EiE Nigeria note the silence of the panels in Abia State and the FCT. Anambra State panel cited logistics issues as the reason for a halt in panel sittings, but Abia State and the FCT have not stated the reason for the discontinued sitting of the panels. We recommend that Panels should remain consistent in their sittings, and be more open to the media in order to ensure transparent processes and timely completion of their duties.
- 3. Compensation for Victims of Police Brutality:** The Nigeria Police Force (NPF) recently distributed N160 million to the families of the officers who were killed during last year's nationwide protest against the disbanded Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS), of the Nigeria Police Force tagged #EndSARS. While we await the recommendations of the Panels, it is curious to note that compensation has been provided for families of police officers without recourse to the Panels while the families of victims of police brutality have to go through a long & difficult process to access justice. We recommend that the recommendations of the Panel for compensation for victims and their families should be paid immediately following the submission of the Panels reports.

Signed

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