

CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF KONTAGORA

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PRESS RELEASE

RE: ATTACK AND KIDNAPPING OF PUPILS, STUDENTS, AND TEACHERS OF ST. MARY'S CATHOLIC PRIMARY AND SECONDARY SCHOOLS, PAPIRI, AGWARA L.G.A., NIGER STATE

St. Mary's Catholic Primary and Secondary Schools, Papiri, Agwara L.G.A., Niger State is a school owned by the Catholic Diocese of Kontagora, managed by Our Lady of Apostles Sisters (OLA) and Most Rev Bulus Dauwa Yohanna is the proprietor.

With deep sorrow and grave concern, we issue this official statement regarding the tragic attack and mass abduction that occurred at our school in the early hours of Friday, 21 November 2025. This incident took place while all the Rev. Sisters were present on the compound, contrary to the misleading information circulating that Sr. Felicia Gyang, OLA, the Principal, had travelled to Abuja when the incident occurred.

The tragic kidnaping at St. Mary's School happened between 1:00a.m. and 3:00a.m., breaching several security points, shooting and injuring a security personal, and abducting pupils, students, and teachers. According to survivors, the attackers operated aggressively and without interruption for nearly three hours, moving through dormitories and rooms before taking the victims away in vans. The incident has left the entire community traumatized and devastated.

In May 2021, when we heard rumours of security threats, we did not hesitate to act, we closed the school for about five months. This decision was made solely by the school management; it was not suggested by anyone. When we later resumed, we went further by employing special local security operatives from Kwara State to safeguard our pupils, students, and staff, because we deeply value their lives and future. This, too, was entirely our own initiative. When the school management later chose to work closely with the security agencies for updates and advise, that was also our independent decision. The information circulating that we failed to adhere to warnings to shut down boarding facilities, or that we ignored any prior notice before the incident, is not accurate, as we are known for complying with orders and directives.

At dawn, several priests from neighbouring parishes arrived to assist the Sisters in coordinating reports of the incident. The Bishop also sent, in an official capacity, Rev. Fr. Fidelis Gaiya, the Coordinator of the Justice, Development and Peace Commission (JDPC), Kontagora Diocese, and Rev Fr Stephen N Okafor, the Diocesan Director of Communications to immediately gather first-hand accounts of what had happened. Later on that same day the Bishop visited the school to speak with the parents and encourage the entire community, assuring them of his support, prayer and seeing to it that the abducted are safely released.

Reports from school officials, diocesan representatives, and escapees show that heavily armed bandits arrived in large numbers, using motorcycles and vans with coordinated precision. **Current records show that a total of 315 persons are unaccounted for (303 pupils (both male and female) and 12 teachers – 4 female and 8 male).** The attack has caused severe trauma across the school and Papiri community, especially given the young ages of many abducted children.

The leadership of the Catholic Diocese of Kontagora has been fully briefed and is prepared to facilitate coordinated humanitarian and spiritual support. We remain open to cooperating with all investigative processes aimed at rescuing our children and preventing future occurrences. We stand steadfast in faith, united in grief, and unwavering in our commitment to ensuring the safe return of every child and teacher. We also urge the media to report responsibly and refrain from sharing unverified claims that could cause further panic. Additional updates will be provided as more information becomes available.

We want to call on everyone to remain calm and prayerful and we also want to assure you that we will continue to actively collaborate with security operatives, community leaders, government and relevant authorities for the safe and quick return of all abductees.

May the Lord grant quick release to those abducted and continue to protect his people from all dangers.



Rev Fr Jatau Luka Joseph
Diocesan Secretary
22 November 2025

