

## Festive Season Imminent

# Armed robbery shoots up again!

***It is the usual practice that as the festive season approaches armed robbers go on the rampage, attacking and violently robbing peaceful citizens of their valuables.***

The latest robbery incidence involved residences of businessmen, mostly Lebanese and Indian nationals. Other indigenous businessmen have also been targeted by the armed robbers, especially in the months of November.

It is however sad to note that while all this was happening, the Inspector General of Police, Francis Munu kept assuring the public that all was calm in the country, although in one breath the police chief admitted that indeed armed robbery was on the increase across the country. This is a contradiction, one Freetown resident noted. How can people be assured of their security when their lives were being threatened daily by armed robbers? The month of November 2011 saw a total of twelve armed robbery attacks mainly at Spur Loop, Spur Road and some parts in the east end of Freetown.

Accounts of these life threatening incidents have been told to our reporter by no less a person that the Chairman of the Lebanese Community in Sierra Leone, Samir Hassanyeh and the head of the Indian community, Mamaj Roywani who gave graphic accounts of the ordeal their national have been through in the hands of the armed robbers.

The police too have confirmed the upshot of armed robbery in the country.

According to Samir Hassanyeh, reports of the armed robberies especially those targeted at his people have the potential to drive away prospective investors in the country. Describing one robbery incident to our reporter, the Lebanese president said in that instance, there were five in number in the group, all of them young men, all wearing masks with combat gears and rifles and carrying other house breaking implements.

Samir Hassanyeh told our reporter that a Lebanese national, Abdul Elah at Spur Loop was left with a deep cut in the face, when the thieves broke into his house, using giant cutters to cut through one of his windows and forced their way in and carted away one television set and other expensive household valuables.

Another armed robbery was carried out at the residence of Hashim Hashim who resides along Spur Road, very close to the Lebanese

Embassy.

His residence was swept clean by the intruders. Samir Hassanyeh reported that the robbers eventually tried to break into Hashim's bedroom which is usually secured by a steel door. As they could not get through the door, the thieves used their cutter to cut the window and forced their way in to the room.

At this juncture, the Lebanese president went on, Hashim took a few millions Leones to give to his tormentors, hoping that it will appease them and leave him alone, fearing that if he didn't do so they might hurt him.

During this traumatic encounter, all attempt to call for timely intervention of close relatives or the police proved unsuccessful until the thieves completed carting away other valuables from the houses.

As if the Spur Road incident could not end the robbery attacks, the Koinadugu Store along Sani Abacha Street and INSONS in the centre of Freetown were also targeted by the armed robbers.

The owners of Pharma Care, Abdul Boukdoud and his wife were given severe beaten after which properties worth millions of Leones were removed from the shop. Eight mobile phones, two laptop computers and one plasma TV were among the items the thieves took away.

The Chairman of the Indian Community, Mamaj Roywani also reported similar robbery attacks. Narrating the incident to Sierrae, Roywani said an Indian businessman residing opposite Lion Bakery was among the victims of armed robbery. He said the Indian businessman who lives in a storey building was asked by the burglars to come down and respond to their demand, which was to open his safe and deposit all his money into their bag after which they disappeared.

Another armed robbery took place at Calaba Town where goods worth Millions of Leone were stolen.

Similarly, an Egyptian medical doctor in the east end of Freetown was robbed of his properties but later recovered them when he reported the matter to the First Lady about his plans to inform his embassy if the stolen items were not returned immediately.

With the rampant incidences of armed robbery, a delegation that included the President of the

Lebanese community met with the Inspector General of the Sierra Leone Police, Alie Francis Munu to register their concerns in order to find lasting solution to their predicament.

"When we met the IG we told him that the outbreak of robbery in the capital is causing fear and sleepless night for us. We expect that when someone goes to sleep he needs to sleep and not to be disturbed by armed robbers," Hassanyeh said.

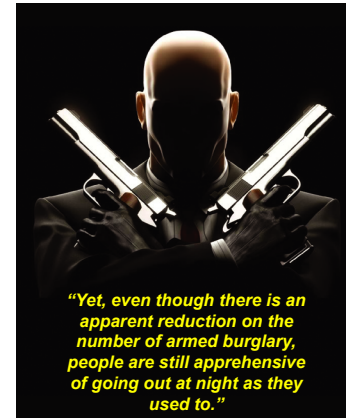
The Inspector General then assured the delegation of his commitment to tackle the ugly incidence of armed robbery which he said is a threat to the peace and security of the civil populace. He promised to deplore policemen at all checkpoints to curtail the spate of robbery in Freetown and other part of the country.

According to investigation conducted by our reporter, the commitment made by the IG Munu has started taking effect as quite a number of policemen have been patrolling areas believed to be the hideouts of criminals suspected to be behind these robberies.

There have been mixed reactions from members of the public over these recent attacks. Some concerned citizens don't want to rule out police complicity in these robberies. A thirty-year old man opined thus: "I am baffled each time I hear that armed robbers wore combat gears with guns in their possession. Where do they get these items from? I am sure it is a syndicate going on between those we expect to protect us".

However, Samir Hassanyeh had a different view of these robberies. "We cannot cast aspersion on anybody for being responsible for the armed robbery in the country. We should be rest assured that the police will be vigilant this time and put their feet down against these attacks," he said. According to a source close to the police, a group suspected to have come from Guinea is in town headed by a notorious armed robber simply known as T. Gana. They are alleged to be behind some of these attacks. Quite a number of arrests have been made though, by the police since the start of their night patrol within the Freetown municipality.

Based on our investigation, the head of crime management at the Criminal Investigation Department, Alfred Karrow Kamara revealed that a team



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from the SLP on Monday 28th November 2011 raided Crab Town at Lumley and its environs where a total of 83 suspects were arrested and detained at the CID.

He said some of the suspects were arrested with marijuana in their possession. He did not specify if the suspects were robbers but he made it clear that loitering is a crime.

Police sources revealed that the raid at Crab Town mainly targeted ghettos and other convergent points for hard core criminals including armed robbers.

However, parents of those arrested by the police during the Monday raid said it was rather unfortunate as the indiscriminate arrest by the police included innocent people who were going about their normal business. According to one Amadu commonly called Area Man, the arrest had nothing to do with the said incidence. He added that he was surprised to hear from his friends in police custody that the police robbed them of their monies, mobile phones, digital cameras, etc.

Following the intensive patrolling and mounting of checkpoints by the Sierra Leone Police at strategic places including the Lumley Beach and other crime prone areas, Mr Hassanyeh noted that there has been some amount of sanity in our security once again, adding that armed robbery had reduced dramatically compared to the last two weeks of November when residences of mainly businessmen were broken in to by burglars.

Yet, even though there is an apparent reduction on the number of armed burglary, people are still apprehensive of going out at night as they used to. ■