

Knowing where the 'Taadi' girls are is not enough; bring them home

Prince Hamid Armah, PhD | 4th April, 2019

The revelation this week by the Director General of the Criminal Investigations Department, DCOP Yaa Tiwaa Addo-Danquah that the Police administration was aware of the whereabouts of the young girls abducted from Takoradi must have brought mixed feelings to many, including myself, who have been following this harrowing story.

For weeks, many of us have shared in the agony of the parents and families who have had their loved ones taken away from them in bizarre circumstances. We have felt their frustration at the pace of investigation and inability to elicit more information from the gentleman arrested for the kidnapping and disappearance of the young girls. And we have prayed for their safety and reunion with their families, and their friends in school.

While Sekondi-Takoradi has had its share of problems over the years, kidnappings have been alien to us. In fact, it's not even a Ghanaian problem. So the incidence of kidnapping on the scale that we have seen has shocked the nation. And it might explain in part at least, our inability to deal with it as quickly as one might have wished. Nevertheless, we owe it a duty to those girls in particular and to all our children in Sekondi-Takoradi and elsewhere to keep them safe and protected, and to ensure that corrective steps are taken for justice to be served.

In this case, more could and should have been done. It is inexcusable that the suspect managed to escape from custody before he was re-apprehended. For such a case in which the hearts of many were literally on the line, there is no way the man who held the key to the whole mystery should have been lost sight of for even a minute. Even as we appreciate the constraints under which the police work, it beggars belief that the suspect managed to keep the security services in the dark for so long. By all measures, we have failed the children, their families and the communities. And we must begin to take immediate steps to restore trust in the security agencies. And that should begin, hopefully, with moving from knowing where the kids are held, as we have been informed, to rescuing and restoring them to their families as soon as possible. The Police must not fail us.

Even as we sympathise with the families, we must also begin to take the issue of security very seriously. The communal structure of our communities, which bestowed additional security, has been compromised by social and economic changes. While these developments are largely welcome, they also mean that we must make adjustments to how we manage our security and lifestyles. We need to keep an ever closer eye on our children, our neighbour's children and the people – strange and familiar – who we find in our communities. We must accept that there are bad actors around and we must prepare for all of such eventualities. We owe our children the highest duty of care and it is a duty we must not be distracted from by any other consideration.

Local authorities must also take this matter up and take steps to ensure that Sekond-Takoradi, and Kwesimintsim in particular and do not become a haven for crime of any nature. This includes stepping up local security arrangements to ensure that undesirable elements and activities are tracked and tackled with dispatch. We must also provide education on preventive security for parents in the community. And we must give support to those whose kids have been so traumatically taken away from them.

As we look forward to a resolution of this sordid matter, I must commend the local activists, media and youth groups who ensured that this received the needed attention. The passion and empathy they have demonstrated to the entire metropolis is gratifying. And that includes our local celebrities such as Kofi Kinaata who kept the issue alive on social media. Thanks also go to the media especially Joy News which launched a #bringbackourTaadigirls, who have kept the nation updated on developments and kept a helpful focus on every twist of this sad story. Sekondi-Takoradi is grateful.

We pray that Madam Tiwaa's announcement marks a turning point in this saga and that the children would soon be returned safe and unharmed. We pray that the process of healing for the children, their families and the community can begin and progress swiftly. We also pray that we can all do our part to make sure that never again would we have to endure the anguish of these last months.

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