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Nigeria Police Mass Arrest Operations and Due Process Concerns: The Need for Legislative Oversight

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Executive Summary

The Nigeria Police Force, through its Delta State Command, recently conducted coordinated security operations across Warri, Ughelli, and Uvwie Local Government Areas, resulting in the arrest of over 270 suspects linked to alleged cultism and illicit drug activities. According to the police, the operations were intelligence-led and aimed at dismantling criminal networks in identified hotspots. However, the scale of the arrests has generated public concern, with some families disputing the allegations and questioning the circumstances of arrest and continued detention. Civil society actors have also raised issues regarding compliance with due process, including delays in arraignment and allegations of custodial misconduct. These developments highlight the importance of ensuring that law enforcement operations remain aligned with constitutional safeguards and the protection of fundamental rights.

While such operations are necessary to address criminal activity, several concerns arise. Questions persist regarding adherence to legally prescribed timelines for arraignment, as delays may constitute violations of constitutional provisions and the Administration of Criminal Justice Act (ACJA). The scale of the arrests raises concerns about the risk of indiscriminate detention, particularly where individuals may have been apprehended based on proximity rather than specific evidence. In addition, conflicting accounts between law enforcement authorities and affected individuals point to gaps in transparency, documentation, and accountability. Allegations relating to custodial welfare further underscore the need for robust oversight of detention conditions and safeguards against misconduct.

The situation also reflects broader systemic challenges, including the need to strengthen public confidence in law enforcement. Protests and reactions from families of detainees suggest a potential trust deficit, which could undermine cooperation between communities and security agencies. Ensuring transparency, accountability, and respect for due process is therefore critical not only for protecting individual rights but also for enhancing the legitimacy and effectiveness of policing efforts.

Given its constitutional oversight responsibilities, the National Assembly has a critical role in ensuring that security operations are conducted within the bounds of the law while safeguarding civil liberties. Legislative engagement is necessary to strengthen oversight of arrest and detention practices, ensure effective implementation of existing legal safeguards, and promote accountability in law enforcement operations without undermining efforts to combat crime.

Accordingly, the National Assembly, through its Committees on Police Affairs, Human Rights, and Justice, may consider the following actions:



- Invite the Nigeria Police Force to provide detailed briefings on the basis for the arrests, the status of detainees, and compliance with constitutional and legal requirements on arraignment.
- Review compliance by the Delta State Police Command with provisions of the Constitution and the Administration of Criminal Justice Act regarding arrest procedures, detention limits, and access to legal representation.
- Encourage the development and enforcement of clear standard operating procedures to ensure intelligence-led targeting, minimise indiscriminate arrests, and strengthen documentation of detainees.
- Call for enhanced custodial transparency and oversight, including the adoption of digital systems for tracking detainees, timely notification of families, and regular reporting on detention conditions.

While large-scale security operations may be necessary in addressing criminal threats, they must be conducted in a manner that upholds due process, protects fundamental rights, and sustains public trust. The recent developments in Delta State present an opportunity for the National Assembly to reinforce legal safeguards, strengthen oversight, and promote accountable policing practices that balance security objectives with the rule of law.

Background:

Recent media reports indicate that the Nigeria Police Force, through the Delta State Command, conducted coordinated operations across Warri, Ughelli, and Uvwie Local Government Areas, resulting in the arrest of over 270 suspects in raids targeting alleged cultism and illicit drug activities¹.

According to the police, the operations were intelligence-led and aimed at dismantling criminal networks operating within identified hotspots. However, the scale of the arrests has generated public concern, with families of some detainees disputing the allegations and questioning the circumstances surrounding their arrest and continued detention.

In the aftermath of the operations, civil society actors and legal advocates have raised concerns regarding compliance with due process, particularly the timeliness of arraignment². There are suggestions that some detainees may have remained in custody beyond constitutionally prescribed limits. Additionally, allegations of a custodial death have emerged, although these claims have been officially denied by the police authorities.

While such security operations are often necessary in addressing criminal activity, these developments underscore the critical importance of ensuring that law enforcement actions are

¹ Dele Ogunyemi, D. (2026, March 28). Police arrest over 270 suspects in Delta black spot raids. Punch. <https://punchng.com/police-arrest-over-270-suspects-in-delta-black-spot-raids/>

² Omonobi, K. (2026, March 28). Police arrest 270+ suspects, seize Drugs in Warri and Ughelli. Vanguard. <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2026/03/delta-police-arrest-270-suspects-seize-drugs-in-warri-and-ughelli/Delta>



consistently aligned with constitutional safeguards, including the protection of fundamental rights, adherence to due process, and institutional accountability.

Given its constitutional mandate, the National Assembly has a vital role to play in exercising oversight over law enforcement agencies to ensure that security operations do not undermine civil liberties. This may include reviewing compliance with arrest and detention procedures, strengthening accountability mechanisms, and promoting reforms that balance effective policing with the protection of citizens' rights.

Issue:

The situation raises broader systemic concerns that require legislative attention:

1. **Due Process and Pre-Arrest Detention:** Questions have emerged regarding whether all suspects are being arraigned within legally stipulated timeframes, as required under Nigerian law. Delays, whether due to operational or systemic constraints, can raise constitutional concerns.
2. **Mass Arrest Practices and Evidentiary Standards:** Large-scale arrests during raids may create risks of indiscriminate detention, particularly where individuals are apprehended based on proximity rather than specific evidence. This reinforces the need for clear operational safeguards.
3. **Transparency and Accountability in Police Operations:** Conflicting accounts between law enforcement and affected individuals highlight potential gaps in communication, documentation, and public accountability, particularly regarding the status and processing of detainees.
4. **Custodial Welfare and Oversight:** Allegations of custodial misconduct, including unverified claims of death in custody, emphasise the importance of robust monitoring and independent oversight mechanisms within detention facilities.
5. **Public Confidence in Law Enforcement:** Public reactions, including protests by relatives of detainees, suggest a potential trust deficit, which can undermine cooperation between communities and law enforcement agencies.

Rationale for Legislative Action

The National Assembly of Nigeria has a constitutional mandate to ensure that security operations are conducted within the bounds of the law while safeguarding citizens' rights.

Legislative engagement is necessary to:

- Strengthen oversight of arrest and detention practices.
- Ensure effective implementation of existing legal safeguards, including provisions of the Administration of Criminal Justice Act (ACJA).
- Promote accountability and transparency in law enforcement operations.
- Prevent potential abuses while maintaining operational effectiveness in crime control.



Proactive oversight can help address systemic gaps and reinforce public trust in security institutions.

Recommendations to the National Assembly:

The National Assembly, through its Committees on Police Affairs, Human Rights, and Justice, is respectfully urged to:

1. Invite the Nigerian Police Force to provide detailed briefings on the basis for the arrests, current status of detainees and compliance with arraignment timelines.
2. Review compliance by the Delta State Police with constitutional provisions and the ACJA regarding arrest procedures, detention limits and access to legal representation.
3. Encourage the Nigerian Police Force to formulate or reinforce standard operating procedures to ensure intelligence-led targeting, minimisation of wrongful or indiscriminate arrests and proper documentation of all detainees.
4. Call on the Nigerian Police Force to enhance custodial transparency and monitoring by adopting digital systems for the tracking of detainees, timely notification of families and regular reporting on detention conditions.

Conclusion:

While mass arrest operations may be necessary in addressing criminal activities, they must be conducted in a manner that upholds constitutional rights, ensures due process, and maintains public confidence in law enforcement institutions.

The issues arising from the recent arrests in Delta State present an opportunity for the National Assembly to strengthen oversight, reinforce legal safeguards, and promote accountable policing practices.

A balanced approach will help ensure that Nigeria's security objectives are achieved without compromising the rule of law or the rights of its citizens.

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