CDS commends human right panel’s verdict on alleged rape, killings

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CDS commends human right panel’s verdict on alleged rape, killings  
  
The Chief of Defence Staff (CDS), General Christopher Musa, has hailed the outcome of the Special Independent Human Rights Investigative Panel into alleged rape, systematic abortions, torture and extra judicial killings by soldiers fighting terrorism in the North East.  
  
General Musa commended the seven-man panel for “painstakingly carrying out a thorough job” since its inauguration by the Nigerian Human Rights Commission (NHRC).  
  
The NHRC in February 2023 instituted a special investigative panel to probe a report by an international news agency, Reuters, that the military ran a secret abortion programme in its fight against terrorists in the North East in the last 10 years, International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) allegations of mass killing by the military in Marte, Borno State.  
  
The seven-member panel was chaired by retired Supreme Court Judge Abdu Aboki and includes a retired major general, a representative from the Nigerian Bar Association and an expert in obstetrics and gynaecology.  
  
The Reuters had reported in 2022 that the military abortion programme involved terminating at least 10,000 pregnancies among women and girls, many of whom had been kidnapped and raped by rebel fighters.  
  
After two years of investigation, the panel on Friday indicted the military over alleged mass infanticide and other killings at Abisari in Marte Local Government Area of Borno State, in 2016.  
  
It, however, absolved the military of allegations of mass abortion made against it by Reuters.  
  
The panel said there was no evidence that the military ran a secret programme terminating at least 10,000 pregnancies of freed captives of Boko Haram terrorists as claimed by the news agency.  
  
The panel recommended compensation to the victims of the killings in Abisare and prosecution of officers suspected to be involved.  
  
NHRC Senior Human Rights Adviser, Hilary Ogbonna, said they interviewed 199 witnesses to get testimonies to arrive at their findings and conclusion.  
  
Reacting to the verdict in a statement, the CDS hailed the panel for exonerating the military from indictments by Reuters and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC).  
  
He said: “No amount of false accusations will distract the Armee Force of Nigeria from exercising its constitutional mandate of protecting the territorial integrity of the nation.”  
  
The statement reads: “The Chief of Defence Staff General Christopher Gwabin Musa has hailed the Special Independent Investigative Panel on Human Rights Violations in Counter Insurgency in the North East for exonerating the Armed Forces of Nigeria (AFN) from indictments by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and Reuters regarding allegations on forceful abortions and other infractions in the North East.  
  
“It could be recalled that the report of the panel specifically stated that the allegations of systematic abortions, torture, rape and extra juducial killings levelled against the AFN were false.  
  
“The CDS therefore commends the 7- man panel led by Justice Abdu Aboki (rtd) for painstakingly carrying out a thorough job since its inauguration in March 2023 by the Nigerian Human Rights Commission.  
  
“General Musa wishes to seize this opportunity to reaffirm the commitment of the Armed Forces of Nigeria to the defence of human rights and resolve to ensure peace reign in the country.  
  
“According to the Defence Cheif “no amount of false accusations will distract the AFN from exercising its constitutional mandate of protecting the territorial integrity of the nation”.