

## **How Immigration Officials Extort Foreigners**

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### **Body**

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**Immigration** officials at various checkpoints have been accused of **extorting** foreigners coming to Abuja from Katsina and Sokoto states but the Nigeria **Immigration** Service (NIS) has dismissed the allegation as false.

Some of the victims mostly Nigerien nationals told our correspondents that the **Immigration** officials usually waylay them at the various checkpoints along Abuja-Kaduna- Zaria road, demanding N1,000 from each person before allowing them to pass.

One of the passengers who witnessed the incidents three times said the **Immigration** officials stopped their vehicles and asked some people they claimed are Nigerien to come down.

"We were travelling inside the Katsina State Transport Authority (KTSTA) bus when the **Immigration** officials stopped our bus peeped inside and ordered the alleged Nigeriens to come out. Thereafter, they would drag them to a short distance and asked them to pay N1,000 each before they were allowed back in to the bus," he said.

He said the officials claimed they recognize the foreigners by their mode of dressing and tribal marks.

"The victims lament the **extortion**, but there is nothing they can do about it. One of them said he had only N500 and the **immigration** officials still went ahead and collected it," he said.

He said the problem is that several Nigerians with tribal marks similar to Nigeriens are sometimes harassed and even **extorted** by the officials.

"Nigerien nationals have to pay N1, 000 to **immigration** personnel to be allowed to enter Abuja," one of the Nigerien citizens told our reporter in Katsina.

They alleged that "unless you obtain Nigerian National Identity Card or residence permit as Nigerien, you must pay N1, 000 to the **Immigration** personnel before you will be allowed to enter into the Nigerian capital, Abuja."

Musa Dalha Gemu, one of the Nigeriens victim of the **extortion**, told Daily Trust at KTSTA Motor Park in Katsina that: "I have been paying the security men N1, 000 anytime I am going to Abuja from Katsina State. The first time I met them was last year when I was travelling to Abuja from Katsina aboard KTSTA bus. On reaching a check-point, our driver asked all Nigeriens in the car to produce their Nigerian National ID card/ residence-permit documents or pay the sum of N1, 000 each."

"The driver said anybody that was not in possession of Nigerian National ID card or residence permit must pay N1, 000 for onward delivery to **immigration** personnel and that was what happened. We all paid N1, 000 each and since then anytime I am traveling to Abuja I have to pay N1, 000."

Another victim, Sule Isya, who spoke to Daily Trust said "I was twice returned to Katsina for not paying N1, 000 to the Nigerian security at a tollgate along Abuja road. Seven of us were returned to Katsina during my last encounter

## How Immigration Officials Extort Foreigners

with them and we have to plan for our trip to Abuja the following day after we got the money from relations in Katsina."

Isya explained that "sometimes the drivers of the buses do collect the money on behalf of the security personnel and on reaching the check-point, they will simply come down and hand over the money to the security before we can proceed."

Muhammadu Kallah Tsagiyel, another Nigerien said many Nigeriens have suspended coming to Abuja due to incessant **extortions** by **immigration** officers.

One of the KTSTA's drivers, who pleaded anonymity, confirmed to Daily Trust that "the issue of **extortion** by the Nigerian **Immigration** service along Abuja road has become a tradition. Most of the drivers plying Abuja road can testify to this. Sometimes, it is we the drivers that will collect the money from Nigerien passengers and hand it over to the security men.

"If you don't want to be delayed by the security men, you have to do that earlier before you arrive at the check-point; otherwise they will ask all the passengers to disembark, separate Nigerians from Nigeriens and then start interrogating Nigeriens about their permit documents. Sometimes even those that have permit documents have to pay some money before they could be allowed to go back to the car.

"There was a time some **immigration** personnel asked 10 Nigeriens to disembarked from my bus because they didn't have money to settle them," adding that "I was ordered to go and I don't know what happen to the passengers after we left. I was only able to give each of them half of their transport fares."

In Abuja, our correspondent reports that the **immigration** officials equally raid motor parks and markets in Abuja to arrest foreigners. A fortnight ago, our reporter witnessed one of such raids at the Area 1 motor park, popularly called El-Rufa'i or Gwagwalada Park in the capital city.

The reporter said the armed **immigration** officials and some policemen stormed the park around 9am and arrested scores of petty traders and touts. There was confusion at the park when the officials fired shots to disperse some youths who protested the arrest.

When contacted, the spokesperson of the **Immigration**, Mr. Olumbar Joachim, said their officials don't **extort** money from "irregular immigrants" even though they operate at the tollgates.

"Yes, there is a check point at tollgates and it is not manned by **Immigration** but the Joint Task Force. If our men identify any irregular immigrant they will send them to the headquarters for further investigation. If they don't have valid travelling documents, they would be eased out of the country. But it is not true that our people collect money from them," he said.

He said the raid at Area 1 was intended to fish out criminals and irregular immigrants.

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