Beat: Miscellaneous

Kenyan security forces end 4-day-long siege at Nairobi mall

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USPA News - Kenyan security forces have brought to an end the four-day-long siege of an upscale shopping mall in the capital Nairobi, President Uhuru Kenyatta announced Tuesday in an address to the nation, declaring three days of mourning and vowing to bring those responsible to justice. The siege began at around noon on Saturday when more than a dozen suspected al-Shabaab gunmen stormed the popular Westgate shopping mall, opening fire with assault rifles and throwing grenades at terrified shoppers.

An unknown number of people were held hostage as the gunmen engaged in gun battles with security forces. "The operation is now over," Kenyatta announced on Tuesday evening as he began his address to the nation. "We confronted this evil without flinching, contained our deep grief and pain, and conquered it. As a nation, our head is bloodied, but unbowed. The criminals found us unafraid, as we ever shall be. We cannot be conquered." Kenyatta said 67 people, including 61 civilians and six members of the security forces, died during the four-day-long siege but indicated that the death toll was likely to increase. "Towards the tail end of the operation, three floors of the Westgate Mall collapsed and there are several bodies still trapped in the rubble, including the terrorists," he said. 175 others were injured. Five of the attackers were shot dead during the operation to clear the shopping mall, while eleven others - of whom only one is believed to have been arrested at the scene - were taken into custody in connection with the attack. The nationalities of the attackers are not yet known, despite initial intelligence reports that a British woman and several Americans were involved in the siege. "I promised that we shall have full accountability for the mindless destruction, deaths, pain, loss and suffering we have all undergone as a national family," Kenyatta said, describing the attackers as "craven wretches and lowly cowards." He added: "These cowards will meet justice, as will their accomplices and patrons, wherever they are." The Kenyan leader, who assured the affected families that his government will provide the necessary support to enable them cope with their loss, declared three days of national mourning starting on Wednesday in honor of the victims. "Official flags will fly at half-mast throughout the country," he said. Cabinet Secretary Francis Kimemia said Kenyatta summoned a special cabinet meeting and National Security Council meeting for Wednesday to evaluate the situation and formulate a way forward. He said the scene at Westgate has been handed over to begin forensic analysis, with a priority on debris clearance to facilitate the recovery of bodies. It remained unclear on Tuesday how many bodies could still be inside the shopping mall, and authorities have refused to say how many hostages were rescued during the course of the operation. Of the 61 civilians who died during the siege, at least 12 were foreigners, including six Britons and Ghanaian poet and diplomat Kofi Awoonor. Kenyatta`s nephew Mbugua Mwangi and his fiancée were also killed.

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