

Plateau: Death Toll Rises To 27 As Residents Recount Ordeal



Residents protest attack by gunmen in Angwan Rukuba in Jos North Local Government Area of Plateau State yesterday.

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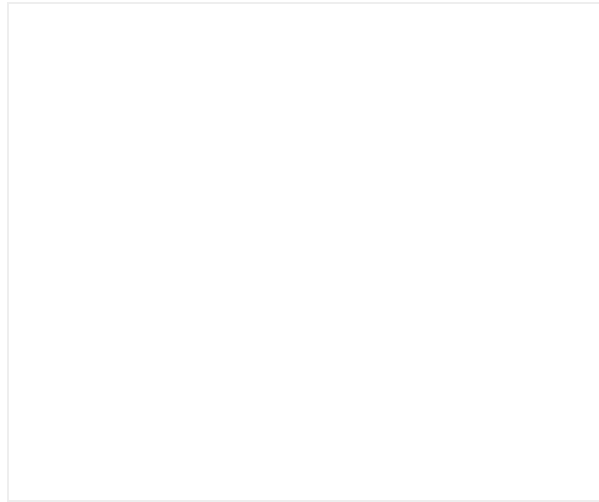
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The death toll in the Sunday attack on Angwan Rukuba community in the Jos North Local Government Area of Plateau State has risen to 27 as residents relive the terror gunmen unleashed on the community.

The attackers, who reportedly wore military camouflage and rode on motorcycles, had stormed the community around 7:30pm while residents were still going about their activities. They started shooting indiscriminately, causing panic among residents who scampered to safety.

The invaders were said to have fled the village after the raid that left 14 persons dead on the spot. In the aftermath of the invasion, angry youths reportedly blocked the road in protest and attacked some motorcycle riders and passengers.



Daily Trust learnt yesterday that 13 persons who were critically injured and rushed to hospitals succumbed to their injuries, bringing the death toll to 27.



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One of our correspondents who visited the community on Monday observed that many families were inconsolable as they grieved over the loss of their loved ones. Residents wore long faces as they trudged about in mourning.

Some of them, who spoke to *Daily Trust*, recounted moments the attackers struck and plunged the community into turmoil. They said by the time the dust settled, many people were found lifeless in a pool of blood.

“Twenty seven persons lost their lives to the attack, including a pregnant woman. Fourteen of them died last night while others who sustained injuries gave up the ghost in the hospital. The community was still bubbling with activities around 7pm when we suddenly began to hear gunshots. Everybody began to run to safety and in the process, many people were shot,” a youth leader of the community, Samson Chiroma, said.

“We have been left devastated by the attack. We are still mourning. Sadly, the community had to suffer this brutal attack because we are peace-loving people. The government must do everything to bring the killers to justice,” he added.

A resident, who spoke on condition of anonymity, lamented that he lost his friend identified as Pam to the attack.

“Pam was a good person and a peacemaker who will be missed by members of the community. He was a school teacher and people loved him. I have been crying since yesterday when we found him shot dead after the attack,” the resident mourned.

Another resident, who wanted to be anonymous, said he lost a family member named Azi, a mechanic, to the raid, adding that they were together shortly before the attack.

“He was full of life yesterday and never knew that such a fate would befall him. We were together on Sunday evening. It was not quite long after we departed when the incident happened. I have been in his house consoling his family. They are completely devastated,” he said.



Victims of the Angwan Rukuba attack receiving treatment at the Jos University Teaching Hospital (JUTH)

He urged the government to compensate the family of the victims, adding that such a gesture, even though it would not bring back the dead, would provide succor.

A food vendor around the area, simply identified as Rose, said they had never experienced such an attack in the community, explaining that the sight was so gory that she broke down in tears on seeing the corpses.

She said, “The people were earlier relaxed because they thought that the attackers were security agents who usually come to the community to check criminal activities and other drug-related issues. They wore military uniforms.

“Before we knew what was happening, they had started shooting sporadically. They killed many people and fled. The people wanted to chase the attackers, but were prevented by the military

personnel deployed to the community.”

The National President of Berom Youth Moulders Association (BYM), Barr Dalyop Solomon Mwantiri, said the attack escalated to Angwan Rukuba within the state capital because of the failure of the authorities to nip it in the bud.

“Twenty seven people were killed – 14 on the spot, while 13 of those injured died in the hospital. We have always been warning that if these attacks were not addressed, it would soon extend to the state capital and this particular incident is now the reality.

“The fact that the attack occurred in the capital city of Jos, where there is security and infrastructure implies that the attackers have become so bold since they have not been stopped. This implies that nobody is safe, including the security operatives themselves and politicians,” he said.

Police confirm 26 dead

The Plateau State Police Command says 26 persons lost their lives in the Sunday night attack. The Commissioner of Police in the state, Bassey Ewah, who made the confirmation on Monday in Jos, also stated that three persons were injured in the attack.

Ewah spoke when Governor Caleb Mutfwang visited the community to commiserate with the victims’ families and the community.

The CP, who described the situation as unfortunate, however, assured the people that the security agents would fish out the perpetrators.

Angry residents on Monday defied the state-imposed 48-hour curfew and took to the streets to protest the attack. The protesters demanded urgent government action to address the recurring violence. Governor Mutfwang condemned the attack, describing it as “barbaric and unprovoked.” He assured residents that security agencies were working to apprehend the perpetrators.

The governor, who visited the community on Monday morning, urged the residents not to take the law into their own hands, assuring them the perpetrators would be fished out.

According to him, the government will give all the dead a befitting burial, adding that there would be no mass burial for the victims. The governor said President Bola Tinubu was also aware of the incident.

Plateau killing barbaric, senseless – JNI

The Plateau State Chapter of Jama'atu Nasril Islam (JNI) described the attack as barbaric and senseless, calling on the government and relevant authorities to investigate those behind the incident. Eyewitnesses on Sunday said the attackers, who rode on motorcycles, invaded the community around 7:30 pm, while people were going about their normal businesses, firing bullets indiscriminately and causing panic among residents.

JNI, in a statement signed by its secretary, Dr. Salim Musa Umar, said, “JNI expressed shock and sorrow over the tragic incident at Anguwan Rukuba, which resulted in the loss of many innocent lives. JNI strongly condemned the attack. It is barbaric, senseless and a grave threat to peace and coexistence in Plateau State.

“We are deeply pained by the magnitude of this tragedy. The sanctity of human life must never be violated under any circumstances. This act of violence is unacceptable and must be condemned by all,” the statement read

Dr Salim further extended heartfelt condolences to the bereaved families and prayed for the repose of the souls of the deceased, while wishing the injured a speedy recovery.

The organisation appealed to residents across the state to remain calm and law-abiding, warning against any form of retaliation that could further inflame tensions.

“At this critical moment, we urge all citizens to exercise restraint. We must not allow anger and grief to push us into actions that could worsen the situation,” JNI stated.

JNI also called on security agencies to immediately launch a thorough, transparent and impartial investigation into the incident, with a view to identifying and prosecuting those responsible.

“It is imperative that the security agencies leave no stone unturned in uncovering the circumstances surrounding this attack. Justice must not only be done but must be seen to be done to restore public confidence and prevent future occurrences,” it added.

The group further urged the government, community leaders and religious stakeholders to intensify efforts toward peacebuilding, dialogue and reconciliation across affected communities.

Background to the crisis

The ethno-religious crisis in Plateau State dates back to September 2001, when violence erupted between Christians and Muslims in Jos, the state capital. The clash, which started as a dispute, quickly escalated into a full-blown religious conflict, leaving hundreds dead and many more displaced.

This marked the beginning of a cycle of violence and mistrust between Christian and Muslim communities. Tensions have simmered since then, with accusations and counter-accusations between the groups whenever trouble erupts in the state. The violence subsequently spread to rural communities, resulting in incessant killings and destruction of property.

The mistrust always leads people to point fingers at one another whenever something goes as residents prefer to live in areas where they are in the majority for safety reasons.

Governor Caleb Mutfwang had last year set up a committee, chaired by retired General Nicholas Rogers, to investigate the remote causes of the crisis and recommend solutions. The committee

discovered that around 11,000 people were killed in the last two decades.

In recent months, when a crisis erupts between farmers who are largely Christians and herders who are mostly Muslims, both parties trade blame. Land ownership and the indigenship are at the heart of the conflict. The Plateau Initiative for Development and Advancement of the Natives (PIDAN) and the Plateau State chapter of the Miyetti Allah Cattle Breeders Association of Nigeria (MACBAN) are calling for dialogue to foster peace. Experts say climate change and agricultural expansion are fueling the unrest.