

# Easter attacks: Bandits kill 16 in Benue, Katsina, Kaduna

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Illustration image: Gunmen

Solomon Odeniyi, John Charles, Israel Bulus, Esha Aliku and Isah Ojo

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A wave of deadly attacks marred Easter celebrations in northern Nigeria, leaving at least 16 people dead and dozens more displaced across Borno, Katsina, Benue and Kaduna states.

In Benue State, suspected armed herders stormed Mbalom, Mbatsada, and Agana communities in Gwer East Local Government Area, killing 10 people and injuring several others, while residents fled to safer areas.

In Kaduna State, terrorists raided two Christian churches in Ariko Village, Kachia Local Government Area, killing five worshippers and abducting 31 others.

The victims were later rescued by Nigerian Army troops following a swift operation, though the attackers escaped with significant casualties.

Katsina State recorded the deaths of one policeman during renewed banditry attacks in Tangani and Sayaya communities of Musawa and Matazu Local Government Areas.

In Borno State, suspected Boko Haram terrorists attacked Awapul community in Chibok Local Government Area, burning houses and shops and forcing residents to flee.

The assault came less than 24 hours after previous attacks on an internally displaced persons camp and a police post in Damasak and Nganzai, which killed four police officers and a civilian hunter.

The attacks came as security forces intensified efforts to rid the region of criminality.

The Benue attackers reportedly invaded the communities late on Saturday, being a market day at Mbalom.

The attackers invaded the market as well as the Mbatsada and Agana communities, leaving at least 10 people dead and several others injured.

The chairman of Gwer West LGA, Timothy Adi, confirmed the attack to *The PUNCH*, adding that two corpses were recovered on Saturday night.

He said, “The invasion and attacks happened yesterday (Saturday) between 5pm and 6pm. Nine corpses have so far been recovered, two yesterday (Saturday) and seven today (Sunday).”

The chairman lamented that the invasion was unprovoked as he called on the Federal Government to help curtail the activities of armed herders in the state.

Efforts to get the response of the state police command spokesperson, DSP Udeme Edet, were not successful as her phone rang out.

Meanwhile, Governor Hyacinth Alia, in a statement by his Chief Press Secretary, Kula Tersoo, condemned the attack, which he described as “a barbaric act and a direct affront to the collective peace and security of the state.”

At least five persons were killed when terrorists invaded Ariko community in Kachia Local Government Area of Kaduna State, attacking two Christian worship centres and abducting several others during Easter celebrations.

The incident threw the community into panic as worshippers scampered for safety.

The councillor representing Awon Ward, Mark Bawa, confirmed the attack to *The PUNCH*.

He named the affected churches as First ECWA Church and St. Augustine Catholic Church, both located in Ariko.

“I am currently on my way to the community to ascertain the exact number of casualties. Some sources said seven people were killed, while others claimed eight. I will provide an update once details are confirmed,” Bawa said.

“The attackers came in large numbers. They surrounded the area and began shooting sporadically at worshippers. Several people were killed, and many others were taken away into the bush,” he stated.

Troops of the Nigerian Army, however, rescued 31 civilians abducted during the service.

The rescue followed a distress call reporting that terrorists had invaded an ECWA Church in the community and abducted worshippers during the service.

A statement on the Army's X handle on Sunday said that on receiving the information, troops swiftly mobilised to the scene and, with support and guidance from members of the Ariko community, advanced in pursuit of the fleeing attackers.

The Army said the troops engaged the terrorists in a fierce firefight, overpowering them with superior firepower.

“Troops of the Nigerian Army, through a swift response, have successfully foiled a terrorist attack, leading to the rescue of 31 civilians abducted during an Easter church service in Ariko Village in Kachia Local Government Area of Kaduna State.

“The swift response followed a distress call reporting the abduction of worshippers during an Easter service at an ECWA Church in Ariko Village.

“The troops, on receipt of the information, promptly mobilised to the scene. With the support and guidance of members of the Ariko community, they advanced in pursuit of the fleeing terrorists and engaged the criminals in a fierce firefight, overwhelming them with superior firepower.

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“The pressure mounted by the advancing troops forced the terrorists to abandon 31 hostages, including one injured victim who is currently receiving medical attention,” the statement read.

The service said troops recovered the remains of five victims already killed by the terrorists at the scene.

“Regrettably, the remains of five victims already killed by the terrorists were also recovered at the scene.

“The fleeing terrorists are believed to have sustained significant casualties, as evidenced by blood trails along their escape routes.

“Troops have since intensified pursuit operations to track the fleeing elements to their enclaves, with ongoing efforts aimed at rescuing any remaining captives and ensuring the perpetrators are brought to justice,” the statement said.

“To consolidate the gains recorded, additional troops have been deployed to the area to reinforce ongoing operations, enhance security presence, and prevent further threats to lives and property,” it added.

A policeman was reportedly killed during the renewed bandits’ attack on Sunday in Tangani and Sayaya communities of Musawa and Matazu local government areas of Katsina State.

On Sunday, Governor Dikko Radda visited the Sayaya community following the attack.

The assailants reportedly invaded the area, ambushed the police station where a policeman lost his life, attacked the primary healthcare centre, and looted several shops in the town.

Radda inspected the affected facilities to assess the extent of the damage and commiserated with residents over the incident.

The governor also condoled with the Divisional Police Officer and officers of the command over the death of the policeman and extended his sympathies to the families affected by the violence.

Governor Radda also directed the deployment of additional security operatives to reinforce safety in the town.

A chieftain of the African Democratic Congress chieftain and former Minister of State for Education, Lawal Batagarawa, had, while briefing newsmen on Sunday, condemned the persistent and unwanted killing of lives, especially in the northern region of Nigeria.

As of the time of filing this report, there had been no official statement from the police on the number of people killed.

Meanwhile, suspected Boko Haram terrorists on Sunday attacked Awapul, a community in Chibok Local Government Area of Borno State.

Our correspondent gathered that the terrorists struck the town in large numbers around 1:30 a.m., shooting sporadically before wreaking havoc on critical infrastructure, including private homes and shops.

Confirming the incident to The PUNCH, the spokesperson of the Borno State Police Command, ASP Nahum Daso, said no lives were lost.

He said, “There was an attack this morning around 1:30 a.m. in Chibok Local Government, in a village called Awapul. The attack was carried out by unknown men suspected to be Boko Haram.”

He added, “No casualties. It was a destruction of properties.”

Residents who spoke to The PUNCH said the attackers rode on motorcycles and operated for over an hour.

One resident, who pleaded not to be identified, said some victims affected by the attack had fled the community in search of safer areas.

“They burned down houses and small shops. Some owners have gone to Chibok main town to take refuge,” the source said.

He called on the government for immediate action to protect the community.

“Our plea is simple, not for food or clothing. What we need is protection so we can go about our daily activities,” the source added.

The attack came less than 24 hours after suspected Boko Haram terrorists attacked an internally displaced persons camp in Damasak and the Nganzai Divisional Police Headquarters in the state, where they partially burnt an unserviceable Armoured Personnel Carrier and killed four police officers and one hunter.

Daso, who disclosed the attack in a statement on Saturday, said the attackers deployed Rocket-Propelled Grenades and other sophisticated weapons in an attempt to overrun the town but were repelled by security agents.

“The attackers, who deployed Rocket-Propelled Grenades (RPGs) and other sophisticated weapons, caused damage to a section of the station and partially burnt an unserviceable Armoured Personnel Carrier (APC).

“Regrettably, four police personnel paid the supreme price in the line of duty,” he said.