

Suspected herdsmen kill 10, injure 15 in fresh Benue attack



...Alia orders manhunt

By Peter Duru

No fewer than 10 persons were reportedly killed and over 15 others injured in the early hours of Wednesday when suspected armed herdsmen attacked Sai community in Mbajir Council Ward of Katsina-Ala Local Government Area, LGA, of Benue State.

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The latest attack came less than a week after the killing of the Benue State Chairman of the Miyetti Allah Cattle Breeders Association of Nigeria, MACBAN, Ardo Risku Muhammad, who was ambushed and murdered at Okudu community in Otukpo LGA while returning from a security meeting in Ohimini LGA.

Residents said the attackers invaded Sai community at about 1am, shooting indiscriminately at villagers who were asleep, triggering panic as many fled for safety.

An indigene of the community, who said he lost a family member in the attack, disclosed that several residents were still missing.

According to him, “From the information at our disposal, the attackers came from neighbouring Taraba State armed with AK-47 rifles. They attacked our community at about 1am when everybody had gone to bed and started shooting people in their sleep.

“The attack caused panic as people struggled to escape. About 10 persons were killed while over 15 sustained serious injuries. Several others are still missing and nobody knows whether they are alive or dead. Search efforts are ongoing.”

He added that most of the injured had been taken to the NKST Hospital in Sai for treatment, while those with critical injuries would be referred to the Benue State University Teaching Hospital, Makurdi.

“There is tension and anger in the community, although security personnel have now moved into the area,” he said.

The Chairman of Katsina-Ala LGA, Mr. Justine Shaku, confirmed the attack, saying he had arrived the community to assess the situation.

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“I have just arrived Sai to ascertain the situation. There is tension in the community. I will provide more details after my assessment,” he said.

Efforts to get the reaction of the Benue State Police Command were unsuccessful as the Police Public Relations Officer, DSP Udeme Edet, could not be reached.

Meanwhile, Governor Hyacinth Alia condemned the attack, describing it as a senseless and cowardly assault on innocent citizens, and directed security agencies to immediately reinforce security in the affected area.

In a statement by his Chief Press Secretary, Tersoo Kula, the governor said he received the report of the attack with a heavy heart, alleging that the assault was carried out by “terrorists masquerading as herdsmen.”

He said, “This attack is an ugly, cowardly and unacceptable act of violence, particularly at a crucial time when our hardworking farmers have returned to their ancestral lands and are cultivating their farms.

“These enemies of progress have chosen to disrupt the peace and food security of our state by targeting communities at a time when crops are developing and hopes for a bountiful harvest are high.”

Governor Alia extended condolences to the families of those killed and wished the injured speedy recovery.

“My heart goes out to those who lost their loved ones as well as other victims currently receiving medical attention. I stand in solidarity with the entire Sai community during this period of immense grief,” he said.

The governor also reassured residents that his administration remained committed to protecting their lives and property.

“We will not allow the forces of darkness to drive our people away from their ancestral lands or dampen their spirits. We are building a Benue where peace and justice prevail, and this setback will only strengthen our resolve,” he added.

Governor Alia directed security agencies to deploy additional personnel to Sai and neighbouring communities, launch an immediate manhunt for the attackers, and strengthen protection for farmers to prevent further attacks during the farming season.

He also urged residents to remain calm but vigilant and promptly report suspicious movements to security agencies, assuring them that the government would not relent until lasting peace is restored across the state.