

Black weekend: Family of nine, 18 others killed in Benue, Plateau



File: Gov Hyacinth Alia of Benue State

By Peter Duru & Golok Nanmwa, MAKURDI/JOS

It was a bloody weekend in Benue and Plateau states as suspected terrorists killed no fewer than 27 persons, including nine members of the same family and a two-month-old baby, in attacks that have renewed fears over worsening insecurity in the North-Central region.

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In Benue State, suspected armed herdsmen killed at least 18 persons in separate attacks on communities in Otukpo Local Government Area, in what seemed to be a reprisal attacks, sparking outrage as angry youths carried the corpses of the victims to the palace of the Och'Idoma and major roads in protest.

The attacks reportedly began on Friday when the terrorists invaded Akpachi village in Ugboju community and killed two farmers on their farmland.

Their bodies were recovered on Saturday and buried.

Barely 24 hours later, at about 4 a.m. yesterday (on Sunday), the gunmen struck again, invading Otukpo-Nobi community, where at least 16 persons were reportedly killed, while several others sustained varying degrees of injuries.

The renewed bloodshed came barely two weeks after the killing of the Benue State Chairman of the Miyetti Allah Cattle Breeders Association of Nigeria, MACBAN, Ardo Mohammed, and his companion, Yakubu Isah, who were ambushed and murdered at Okutu community in Otukpo while returning from a peace meeting in Idekpa, Ohimini Local Government Area.

The killings triggered widespread anger as protesting youths stormed the palace of the Och'Idoma with the victims' corpses, disrupting an ongoing church service and demanding decisive action to halt the recurring attacks.

Chanting war songs, the protesters accused authorities of failing to protect their communities, insisting that "enough is enough."

The demonstration paralysed activities in Otukpo as major roads were blocked, leaving commuters stranded for hours.

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A resident, Ebi Adovi, appealed to the Federal Government and the Benue State

Government to urgently deploy more security personnel to the area.

According to him, “After killing two people in Ikpachi on Friday, this morning, they attacked Otukpo Nobi killing 16 persons including women and children. My neighbour lost her elder sister and her children in that attack. And the figure may be higher because search is still ongoing for missing people.

“Angry youths have taken over all the roads leading in and out of Otukpo. And the protest will continue in the days to come because we are tired of these killings without any tangible action from the authorities.

“Even the Commissioner of Police who came to Otukpo to visit Otukpo Nobi community spent hours on the road before he was eventually allowed passage after persistent appeals,” he said.

Confirming the attacks, Chairman of Otukpo Local Government Area, Maxwell Ogiri, linked the incident to possible reprisals following the killing of the MACBAN chairman.

“You know, I am sure the news of the death of Ardo Risku Mohammed is no longer news to you, and with the mindset of the people we are dealing with, you should also know that reprisals will likely occur,” Ogiri said.

He explained that the first attack occurred on Friday when three villagers went to their farms in Akpachi.

“The bandits came and killed two of them. One escaped and alerted the community. We recovered the corpses on Saturday and buried them. We had combed the bushes believing the attackers had fled, but very early this Sunday morning, around 4 a.m., we received reports that they had besieged Otukpo-Nobi, killing several people and injuring many others.

“We are making efforts to move survivors to safer locations and ensure they receive proper care. Security has also been reinforced in the area,” he added.

Ogiri appealed for calm, saying efforts were underway to prevent further violence.

“We are trying to calm the youths so that they do not vent their anger on innocent passers-by. They took the bodies of the victims to the palace of the Och’Idoma as part of their protest. When people are afraid and feel helpless, it is difficult to predict how they will react. This is simply their immediate response to the tragedy,” he said.

Gov Alia condemns attacks

Reacting to the killings, Governor Hyacinth Alia condemned what he described as barbaric attacks on Akpachi village and Otukpo-Nobi community.

In a statement by his Chief Press Secretary, Tersoo Kula, the governor described the attacks as “not only a breach of peace but also a barbaric and inhuman assault on the sanctity of life and the collective soul of the people of Benue State.”

He lamented that the attacks occurred despite efforts by his administration, traditional rulers and security agencies to restore peace

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“These acts of mindless bloodshed are a direct attempt to sabotage the progress of our state. Your lives are precious, and I can assure you that your ancestral lands will not be surrendered to fear.

“My government stands firmly with you, and we will not allow our communities to be turned into killing fields. We urge every citizen to cooperate with the police and military by providing timely and credible intelligence. Security is a collective responsibility, and your information is a vital tool in our defence,” he added.