

10 polio workers shot dead in Kano

...It's an act of cowardice – Pate
...We're trailing the gunmen -IG

At least nine women and a man who were vaccinating children against polio have been shot dead in another major violence after the January attack on the Emir of Kano, Alhaji Ado Bayero.

Lawan Danjuma Adamu & Haruna
Gimba Yaya, Kano

Gunmen yesterday shot dead nine female polio workers and a male official in two separate attacks in Kano city. The killings came hours before the arrival of the Inspector General of Police Mohammed Dahiru Abubakar and Minister of Police Affairs Capt. Caleb Olabode, in the state for condolence over the attack on the Emir of Kano, Alhaji Ado Bayero and to inspect projects at the Police Academy in Wudil.

The twin attacks, which were the first of their kind on health officials in the state, happened about one hour apart at Filin Cashew area of Unguwa Uku and Hotoron Haye at eastern by-pass.

A woman and a man were killed while four other persons were injured in the first attack that took place around 9am at a clinic in the Filin Cashew area, residents said, adding that the assailants drove to the area in a tricycle, popularly called A Daidata Sahu.

The victims, some of them students of Kano State School of Hygiene, were preparing for the day's vaccination, when they came under fire.

After gunning them down, they locked them up inside the building and attempted to set it ablaze, said eyewitnesses. The fire was said to have been put out by one of the survivors.

Also, *Weekly Trust* learnt that another female victim who was shot in the head later died at the hospital while receiving treatment.

Seven other women were killed in another attack on another clinic about five kilometres away by six gunmen driving a tricycle.

At Haye, eyewitnesses said the gunmen arrived at the three-bedroom local dispensary and opened fire with women packed inside collecting vaccination materials.

Residents said the attackers were seen jubiling while fleeing the scene.

"The victims were either shot in the head or neck," said a neighbour who visited the scene immediately after the attack.

The areas were cordoned off by security agents after the attack. Many residents were said to have fled their homes immediately after the attack before returning later.

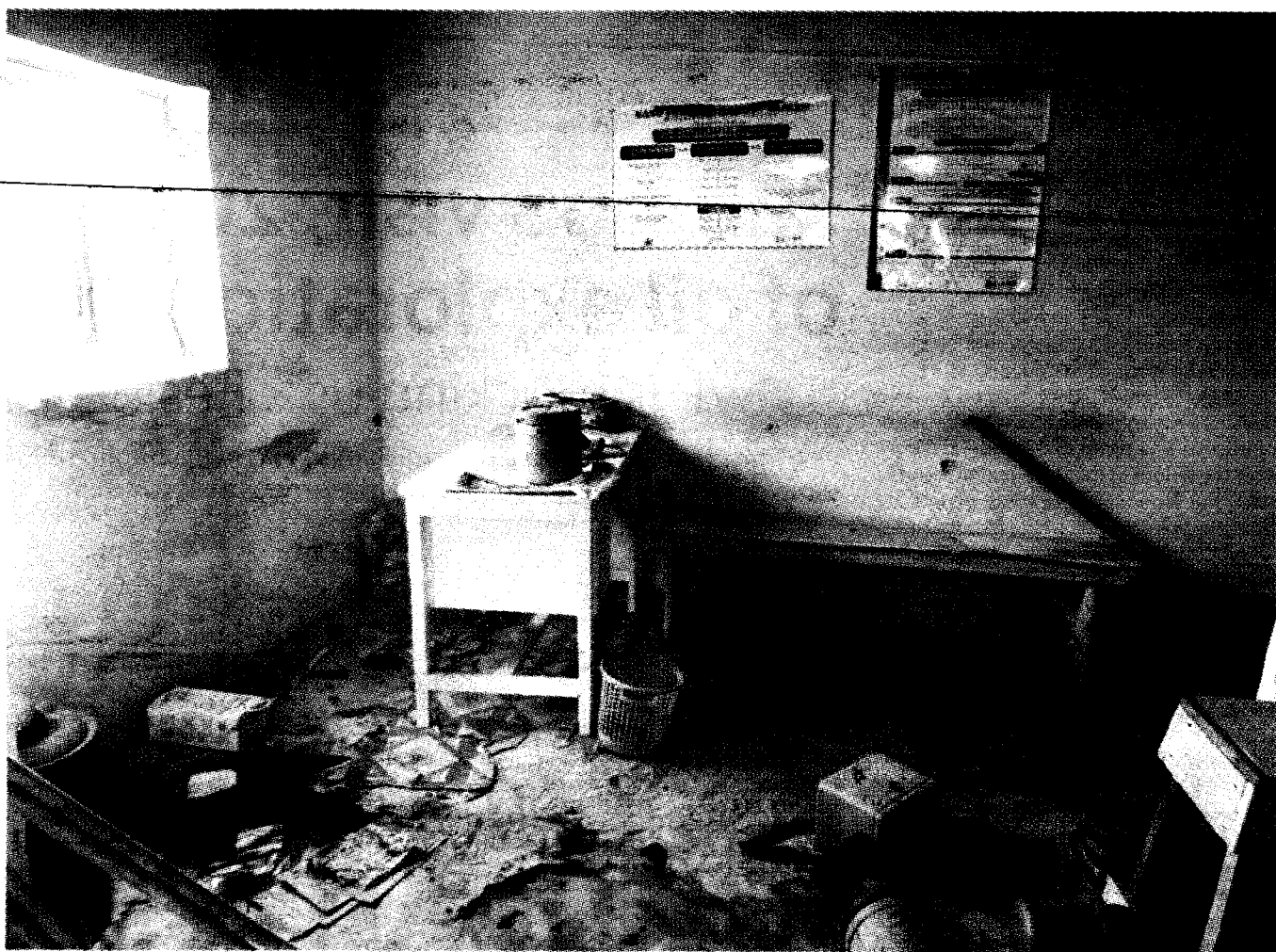
Blood, papers and vaccine coolers littered one of the rooms, our correspondent reports.

In October last year, gunmen killed two policemen escorting polio workers during a vaccination outing.

Yesterday's attack, which was the first on vaccination officials, happened when health officials in the state were preparing for a mop-up exercise to round off a four-day polio vaccination campaign.

There are fears already in Kano following yesterday's attack that officials may refuse deployment on vaccination for fear of attacks, which could hamper the progress recorded in fighting the disease.

Kano State has been an endemic polio state, since 2003 when the then state government suspended vaccination against the scourge for 13 months, citing health



■ An inside view of Haye dispensary showing congealed blood and abandoned polio vaccine kits where seven female polio immunisation workers were shot dead by gunmen on tricycle.

concerns.

Last year, the state recorded 17 polio cases, out of 121 cases reported in Nigeria.

Confirming the attack, spokesperson of the Kano Police Command, ASP Musa Magaji Majia, said nine women were killed in the two attacks, adding that the gunmen fled the areas before the arrival of security men.

Meanwhile, IG Abubakar has commended the Kano State government and people for the support and cooperation they were giving security agencies in their effort to curtail insecurity in the state.

He said the police are happy with the level of understanding and cooperation between the state government and his men, and therefore appealed to the people to keep cooperating with the police.

Answering question on the health workers killed yesterday by unidentified gunmen, Abubakar said police are working towards apprehending the perpetrators. He emphasized that despite the incident, the state is still safe and assured people that with their continuous support and prayer, the insecurity would be overcome.

Earlier, Minister of Police Affairs, Capt. Caleb Olubode said they were in the state to commiserate with government and people of the state over the recent attack on the entourage of Emir of Kano and also to inspect the ongoing project at the Police Academy in Wudil.

Olubode also condoled the families of those who had lost their lives during the attack. While praying for the repose of the souls of those killed, the minister called on the people to also pray for peace to return to the state.

In his speech, the state governor who spoke through his deputy, Abdullahi Umar Ganduje, thanked them for the visit and tasked the police to be dynamic in their approaches to issues.

Also reacting to the attacks yesterday, Minister of State for Health and Chairman, Presidential Task Force on Polio Eradication, Dr. Muhammad Ali Pate, was disturbed by this dastardly act of cowardice that has not spared the very people who have paid the ultimate price because of their commitment to humanity and love of their profession.

"Our hearts go out to the families, friends and colleagues of these brave women killed today (yesterday); we also commiserate with the families of those non-health workers who also lost their lives. Our nation mourns the demise of these nine women who toiled night and day to ensure that our children receive vaccines that would protect them from polio, measles, tetanus, diphtheria and pertussis," Pate said in a statement by his spokesman Tashikalmah Hallah.

He said the attack was an affront to "our culture and civility, we first and foremost recognize the human tragedy it represents.

The twin attacks, which were the first of their kind on health officials in the state, happened about one hour apart at Filin Cashew area of Unguwa Uku and Hotoron Haye at eastern by-pass

Nevertheless, we are encouraged by words from the frontline workers who have re-stated their resolve to remain undeterred by today's violence. These nine health workers and those injured are our heroes in the fight against maternal and child mortality in the country.

"It is my belief that our security men and women will launch a large-scale investigation to unearth the proximal and remote causes of these incidents with a view to ensuring that no stone is left unturned in the bid to apprehend the perpetrators of this heinous crime."