



■ A burnt house in the attack



■ Another apartment touched by the invaders

Agatu lives in perpetual fear of unknown invaders

For the third time this year alone, invaders had sacked Agatu community, an extremely rural community in Benue State. Weekly Trust reports

Hope Abah, Makurdi

MADAM Aladi Timothy is fortunate to have escaped unhurt from the fresh crisis which erupted in her remote village in Agatu Local Government Area of Benue State.

Reports suggest that in the early hours of last Sunday, unknown gunmen invaded the area and unleashed terror on the inhabitants. At least, two more persons were gruesomely murdered in Egwuma village with four communities sacked in the day light attack.

The middle aged widow is, however, pensive till now, because her son is missing. She said, for days now, there has not been any trace of his whereabouts, since the latest mayhem.

"I don't know where my son is at the moment. Our attackers came in a broad day light between 2pm and 3pm and started killing people without any provocation. We had to run for our lives to every direction," the mother recalled.

"We didn't look for anybody's trouble, yet they came and displaced us from our Egwuma home and burnt down our houses. My house was also razed down, but I'm more concerned about the where about of my son," Madam Timothy said in tears.

The woman who now takes refuge in a relative's apartment at Ankpa quarters in Makurdi said her son is in his 20s, adding that several other youths about his age are also missing in the repeated attacks on Monday.

Corroborating her story at a press conference in Makurdi on Tuesday, an Agatu elder and a retired federal Director of Pension, Chief Andrew Saleh Idakwo lamented that the renewed attack was one too many on his people in recent times.

He expressed worry that only on Sunday, a village head was beheaded, with four youths taken away by the invaders. He said the following day, four communities were completely sacked with many people still missing.

Idakwo said the attackers have introduced new dimensions to the invasion as they

separated the Muslims from persons of other identified religions before unleashing terror on the victims.

"It is worrisome that a new dimension is being introduced to the attacks. All those identified as Muslims were kept in the mosque, while the others were hacked to death and their houses burnt down," he said.

He expressed dissatisfaction with security in the area, saying the situation is pitiable as there were no security operatives on ground to defend the rural populace.

He appealed to the Federal Government to urgently come to their aid or equip their youth with arms to defend themselves against the invaders considering the inaccessibility of the Agatu domain.

"We need greater government involvement in the area. If the security would not come to fight for us, then the FG should arm our youths to defend our land. This new development is a jihad against our land and we will not watch a homeless people come to displace us from our fore fathers inheritance," Idakwo added.

Earlier, a legislator, Hon. Sule Audu representing Agatu constituency in the Benue State Assembly raised alarm over what he described as the infiltration of Boko Haram to riverine communities in his locality in the past six days.

Audu said the suspected insurgents numbering more than 1,500 had seized four villages in the riverine borders of Nasarawa and Kogi States respectively.

"In the past six days, four villages in my constituency had been under siege. An extension of Boko Haram insurgents had seized the villages, sacked the people, burnt down houses and made the area their abode," he said.

The lawmaker listed the captured communities to include; Ejuma I, Ejuma II, Ogumogbo and Ikpele, stressing that the militia had gained access through Loko in Nasarawa State.

According to him, the Sarkin Loko was overpowered by the militia when he attempted to stop the troop from crossing the river through his territory to the other side of Agatu region in Benue State.

He said a village head was beheaded and four locals are still missing in the latest attacks, adding that at least 175 lives had been lost between May and September this year alone, following incessant attacks on his constituents.

Spokesman of the police, Daniel Ezeala could not confirm the fresh crisis as he said the command was yet to receive any briefing on the matter. He, however, urged the people to report any break down of law and order to the police.

"We cannot say what we don't know. The people should report such matters to the DPO in the area so that the command would be aware of the development," Ezeala maintained.

But Audu claimed at various times that the case was reported to appropriate security agencies in the state and yet not adequate protection had been given to the area which he however admitted was difficult to access.

The lawmaker said the inadequate policing of the vicinity was responsible for the successive attacks on his people, lamenting that they are now left without a livelihood since economic and social activities in the area had been crippled.

He said if the few security men posted to secure the riverine boundary between the area and Nasarawa State were well equipped, the insurgents would not have overpowered the paramount ruler of Loko before gaining their entry route to Agatu.

"I was duly informed by the Sarkin Loko that he ordered his people not to transport the unusual crowd with their boats to the other side of the river soon after the suspicious move was noticed," the lawmaker said.

According to him, "the militia opened fire at the riverside and forced the boat operators to transport them across the river to the villages, which are now their settlements, having been driven from the north."

Audu also said the suspected insurgents who in his estimation are foreigners may have taken the advantage of the difficulties often experienced by security men due to the terrain, to unleash terror on members of the rural community, whose occupation is mainly fishing and farming.

Although, the previous clashes had been between Agatu and Fulani herders, Audu feared that the past few days attacks assumed a new dimension and that the people involved were suspected to be from Mali, Chad and Niger.

Meanwhile, the lawmaker said the displaced people are scattered around neighbouring communities in the local government area with some of them moving to their relatives in nearby Kogi State. He appealed to relevant bodies to come to the aid of the people with relief materials to assuage their sufferings.

Similarly, Chief Idakwo also urged Idoma people in privileged positions to reach out to the Agatu displaced persons who in the past one year are suffering from one calamity to another.

He said "first, it was the devastating flood that washed away their farmlands last year. Barely six months after, precisely in May this year, the Fulani cattle breeders launched an attack on them and now the new dimension suspected to be a jihad against the people by some foreigners."

"In Agatu at the moment, no economic activity is going on. No schooling for the kids. Nothing is happening at all. My people are dying of hunger as the crisis wouldn't let them go to farm. The entire communities have been deserted. The destruction caused in the area by the invaders is massive," Idakwo said.

Executive Secretary of the Benue State Emergency Management Agency (SEMA), Adikpo Agbatse said his team is working on intervention to provide succour for the displaced people in the area, adding that in the next few days, the agency's reaction would be felt.

Meanwhile, Garus Gololo, State Secretary of the Myetti-Allah Cattle Breeders Association of Nigeria (MACBAN) said he was not aware of any involvement of his people in the latest crisis.

He, however, promised that investigation would be carried out into the matter before commenting on the issue. Gololo has always confirmed past incidences of clashes between the Agatu natives and his Fulani herders.



■ The displaced people in Agatu