

BOMBED BRIDGE EXPOSES GAMBORU TO HUMANITARIAN CRISIS

Category: [New s](#) Published on Saturday, 10 May 2014 05:00 Written by Hamza Idris, Maiduguri Hits: 330

- . Over 350 buried in mass graves
- . Supplies and communications cut-off
- . Residents now buy food from Cameroon

Clamour across the world for the rescue of over 300 girls that are still in the custody of Boko Haram insurgents is eclipsing a humanitarian crisis looming in Gamboru-Ngala local government area in the Northern part of Borno State, where nearly 400 people have been massacred by the sect. The attacks were carried out in broad daylight on the 5th of May, 2014 but the travails of those affected remain unnoticed. Also, the bombing of a major bridge, 20 kilometers away from Gamboru has already severed the once-thriving town from the rest of Nigeria.

For over a year, no Nigerian GSM network functions in Gamboru, after Boko Haram militants destroyed the masts in the area, forcing locals to subscribe to Cameroonian telecoms services. Residents of Gamboru and Ngala said they now see themselves as "more of Cameroon than Nigeria".

"Eighty-five per cent of the bridge is gone and no heavy truck can afford to cross which means basic needs like food and cooking oil cannot be taken across, with only light vehicles able to meander their way there," Modu Abba, a resident of Ngala said. He added that the towns are now bereft of all privileges of life. "Everything has been destroyed and for us to get even matches, we have to cross the border, not to mention that the price of everything has quadrupled," he said.

Another resident of Gamboru, Jime Umaru, said a gallon of five litres of petrol now costs N2, 500 instead of the N485 official price. "Trucks that convey fuel to this town are reluctant to take off from Maiduguri because of numerous dangers." According to him, youths have to enter parts of Cameroon in order to buy fuel in jerry cans before "importing" the much-needed commodity into Gamboru and Ngala.

Beside the over 300 people that were buried in the first three days of the attack, 54 additional bodies were recovered from the debris of burnt shops at the main market between Wednesday and Thursday, youth volunteer Kolo Abbaram said. "Most of those recovered took cover in shops and tents meant for grains in order not to be caught in the crossfire, but unfortunately, several explosives went off in the market," he said.

Abbaram added that ten people were buried in each mass grave because it was not possible to bury them individually. Residents also fear that they may face an epidemic if urgent measures are not taken.

On the day of the attack, over 150 insurgents, armed with rocket-propelled grenades and explosives reportedly rode in a convoy of many vehicles with three armoured personnel carriers giving them cover and surrounded the border town, killing at will. Being a market day, Gamboru was thronged by merchants. As soon as they arrived, the attackers swung into action, laying siege and subduing the security on ground. They killed nearly 20 and wreaked havoc for almost four hours, between 1.30pm and 5.30pm. Residents said that the arrival of an aircraft did not deter the attackers.

A trader, Mumin Bo, said the attack felt like the end of the world. "We feel we are no longer Nigerians, we have been abandoned," he said.

Gamboru Ngala has an area of 1,465 km² and a population of 237,071, according to the 2006 census. Not far from the oil-rich Chad Basin, Gamboru is blessed with vast fertile land where crops like wheat, rice, and vegetables are



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Page:1 / 4

grown. Almost eighty-five percent (85%) of the people in the area are farmers, herdsmen and fishermen. The area has enormous agricultural and livestock development potentials and is the largest livestock centre in Borno and by extension Nigeria as a whole.

For now, like people in many parts of Borno State, the residents of Gamboru and Ngala are calling for global attention to stem the violent uprising of the Boko Haram militants. Sources close to Governor Kashim Shettima said he will soon visit Gamboru to commiserate with the people.

"There are security issues and that is why the governor is delaying his trip," said Bakura Mustapha, Chairman of Ngala Local Government, who added that the state government has reached out to the victims and more relief will be offered and that those who sustained injuries are being treated.

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