

# Suspected herders kill 17 in Benue



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Suspected herdsmen Sunday killed 17 people in Aeuede village of Agatu Local Government Area in Benue State.

It was the first attack on the area this year after five riverine villages of the Idoma speaking locality were invaded in December 2014. Gunmen suspected to be herders from Nasarawa State attacked and killed six people in one of the affected communities.

A native of the area, Dele Agogo, who spoke to our correspondent by telephone yesterday said eight corpses had so far been recovered.

Nine more dead bodies were recovered from some Agatu villages following the heavy ongoing attack in the area. This brings the total number of causality to 17. Residents said apart from the initial eight people killed in Abugbe, three bodies were recovered from Okololo while two were recovered in Ochonlonya and four from Ogwule. Police spokesman, DSP John Bako, said the gunmen invaded the area in a guerrilla manner but security has been beefed up with the deployment of more policemen.

Agogo said the suspected herders crossed over from Loko in Nasarawa State and unleashed terror on the community which lies at the bank of River Benue, adding the attackers were already advancing towards Ogbagaji, headquarters of the local council.

"As we speak now, more than a thousand villagers have fled their abode and heading to Otukpo for safety while the gunmen are marching towards Ogbagaji. We are in danger and we don't know what to do," he said.

A lawmaker representing the area at the state House of Assembly, Sule Audu, confirmed the attack, and said the suspected Fulani cattle breeders "came into the Agatu communities by boat from a border town of Nasarawa State".

He expressed worry that the situation was still quite critical at about 3:50pm yesterday, stressing that more of the gunmen were being noticed in the affected village and its surroundings just as his people were fleeing in huge numbers to safety. But, state secretary of the Myetti Allah Cattle Breeders Association of Nigeria (MACBAN), Garus Gololo, denied the attack, saying: "there are no Fulani cattle breeders in Agatu anymore. They migrated to Loko in Nasarawa State, where they were also attacked by the indigenes and they left."

Gololo said the current crisis in Agatu could have been politically motivated to make the people attack each other and then blame it on herders.

The state's police spokesman, DSP John Bako, told our correspondent that efforts were being made to confirm the actual figure of casualty.

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