

# Man speechless after losing 2 wives, daughter in Omusu mayhem

By Hope Abah, Makurdi | Publish Date: Mar 24 2018 2:00AM

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Scores of sympathisers tried in vain to pacify Mr. Michael Ilom at Omusu community of Edumoga in Okpokwu Local Government Area of Benue State after suspected herdsmen on Monday, March 5, attacked the village at about 2pm, killing those they could find.

At the end of the rampage, 26 persons laid dead, including Michael's two wives and an 11-year-old daughter, as well as 12 other women and two children.

At the nearby Onaka village in the same district, the chairman of the community was also hacked to shreds alongside others while several houses were burnt.

Michael clutched a baby to his shoulders as he managed to identify the corpse of his daughter, Catherine, in a bush while Governor Samuel Ortom was on visit to console the bereaved during an assessment visit of the area a day after. It appeared Michael's world had crashed as his wives, Esther and Comfort, left him with infants.

Michael's grief was evidently too heavy a burden to bear, as he could only nod and remain speechless. A relative said there was nothing to talk about as their pain could only be handled by silence.

"I don't know what to say, I can't say anything, this is too painful," he said.

Another resident, Attah Joseph, could not hold back tears as he said slowly after several minutes of silence, "My aunty is dead, they killed my aunty, she was a good woman, she was my uncle's wife, I lived with them."

Residents said at about 2pm that day, they suddenly started hearing gun shots in the peaceful rural farming community.

"It was about the same time farmers were returning from farms and school children from schools while women were cooking lunch as others relaxed under trees from the scorching heat," Stephen, a resident, said.

He said the sound of gunshots caused pandemonium as everyone ran in different directions but some were caught up trying to escape.

Eight people were killed in a room after running there to take refuge but the attackers broke into the room and hacked all of them to death.

"Others such as Catherine Ilom were coming back from school when the evil men seized them, dragged them into the surrounding bush and hacked them to death," Stephen added. The police later confirmed 25 people dead following the recovery of more bodies.

The Commissioner of Police, Fatai Owoseni, at a news conference in Makurdi, said the casualty figure as collated from hospitals and mortuary attendants was 25, including the body of a herdsman.

He said another herdsman was missing while four persons were undergoing interrogation in connection with the killings.

He explained that earlier that day, the police were alerted on an allegation that some youths in the area had engaged some herdsmen in a fight during which some cows were killed while two herdsmen were declared missing.

According to him, a peace meeting was immediately called with the chairman of Okpokwu LGA and leaders of the Fulani community in the area, including the father of the two missing herders

as well as the police in attendance. A police search party went into action while the meeting was held.

As the meeting progressed, a party in the conflict sent secret messages to their kinsmen elsewhere, leading to the attack which also led to the burning of four houses. He vowed that the command would fish out the perpetrators and bring them to justice.

The Okpokwu council chairman, Olofu Ogwuche, also said immediately after receiving a report from the police that some herdsmen lodged a complaint that some people had rustled their cattle in the village, he called all the parties for an amicable resolution.

Ogwuche said while the meeting was going on, he got another report that herdsmen were already attacking the village.

“On getting to the village, we were able to recover 17 corpses on Monday evening. 24-hours later, we recovered six other corpses and just while we are here (during Ortom’s visit), the corpse of an 11 year old girl was just recovered while some persons are still missing,” Ogwuche said.

Governor Samuel Ortom has demanded the arrest and prosecution of the attackers suspected to be herders.

Ortom spoke at St. Bernard’s Primary School Ugwu-Okpoga, headquarters of Okpokwu LGA during a mass funeral church service in honour of the victims.

The governor while addressing mourners at the service reiterated his call to security agencies to arrest the leadership of Miyetti Allah Kautal Hore who he alleged were the sponsors of the killings in the state based on comments credited to them as carried by various media outfits.

Sadly, Michael, who lost two wives and a daughter, could not attend the funeral service as he waited back home to receive the corpses of his wives for burial in their respective fathers’ houses in line with the Idoma tradition of returning remains of married women to their fathers’ compounds