

'I helplessly watched mom, baby burn to death'

By Rakiya A. Muhammad, Sokoto | Published Date May 18, 2019 6:15 AM

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Aina'u Hassan

Aina'u Hassan, 20, watched helplessly as a woman she was with earlier got burnt to death with her baby strapped on her back during attacks by bandits in Sabon Birni Local Government Area (LGA) of Sokoto State. From Faltse village, she is one out of thousands displaced by attacks, and are now taking refuge in Gatawa town.

Aina'u, speaking to Daily Trust Saturday, recalled horrific accounts of May 7. "I arrived same time with the woman from a visit to her family here in Gatawa around 4pm. It was while we were coming down from commercial motorcycles

that the bandits arrived our village in a convoy of many motorcycles. They wore all-black, with helmets. Each motorcycle had three to four people, all armed with rifles. They came to our village from the western part of Kwakwara and Kari villages.”

A D V E R T I S E M E N T

“Upon hearing the gunshots, the woman got frightened and rushed into a nearby building while I ran in the opposite direction.” Unfortunately, the bandits who had killed some residents of the community, soon got there and set fire to the place.

Sensing danger, the woman with her baby still strapped on her back, decided to come out. “But as soon as she ran out, the structure fell on them. She got so badly burnt that she had to be buried with the child on her back because they were fused together by the intense heat.”

A D V E R T I S E M E N T

Six other people were burnt beyond recognition. Traumatized, Aina whose husband was on a business trip to Mayaki village at the time of the attack, remained in Gangara until he returned and they joined other displaced persons at Gatawa.

Daily Trust Saturday also spoke with Zainab Ibrahim, 76, who was overcome with grief after her eldest son was shot by the bandits. The bereaved granny, whose other son was receiving treatment at a medical centre after sustaining gunshot wounds, could barely speak.

Zainab is one of the displaced persons at Gatawa, comprising children, women, and men allegedly attacked or harassed out of many villages in Sabon Birni area of Sokoto State by bandits. Among the villages affected are Dadin Kowa, Rora, Magira, Asha Ban Za, Katsallen Tanko, Katsallen Kafe ,Koshin Ruwa,Garin Malamai and Dama.

In droves, the IDPs left everything and trekked to safety as the bandits rustled over a hundred cattle, sheep and goats and set fire to some buildings.

In the course of their flight to safety, a pregnant woman, Hasiya Yahaya, gave birth to a baby boy in a watermelon farm. Another woman gave birth to a set of twins, while yet another had a baby boy at Gatawa. The nursing mothers and their babies were said to be doing well as they have relocated to their relations' abode for proper care.

Spokesman of the District Head of Gatawa, Mukhtar Super, said the IDPs arrived Gatawa almost two weeks ago. "They were received by the leaders and taken to temporary camps at Gatawa Secondary School, Nizzamiyya School and an old structure that served as the town's medical centre. After verification, a meeting was held where it was decided that every household must accommodate an IDP depending on their capability. We finally succeeded in putting up all the IDPs with some of them taking shelter at a relation's house or at vacant houses owned by residents," he explained.

A host, Alhaji Samaila A. Ibrahim Gatawa, revealed: "I have two families currently in my residence. I had additional rooms not occupied in my house, so I allowed them use them. I feed them breakfast and supper since their arrival, and I am ready to take more if there is need to do so, till they return home."

The villagers told Daily Trust Saturday that a Commissioner from the area, Alhaji Sirajo Salihu Gatawa, provided a hundred sacks of guinea corn, while one Alhaji Ibrahim Ismail donated a hundred bundles of millet.

Another host, Alhaji Ibrahim Ismail, said the IDP's coming was timely considering the need to assist the needy in this period of Ramadan. He however decried lack of government presence since the IDPs had been staying in Gatawa. "This is their second week here, yet no one cares to come and assess the situation."

All across Gatawa town, IDPs take shelter at every available shade.

On how they are coping with life away from home, and the fact that it is Ramadan season, one of the IDPs, Alkasim Isah, 60, said "We're managing, as Allah is in control. I left my village, Magira, which is seven kilometers away, at about 4pm and arrived Gatawa by 5pm. I use my oxcart to transport some of my belongings. Now every morning since I arrived here a week ago, I use my cart to go back home and salvage some of our properties, especially foodstuffs."

According to him, the bandits burnt down most things the moment they discovered people had fled. He expressed appreciation to their host community, and prayed Allah to reward them.

No local government official was at the secretariat as at the time Daily Trust Saturday visited. When contacted, Director General, Sokoto Emergency Management Agency, Ibrahim Haliru Dingyadi, said efforts were on at the local

and state levels to come to the aid of the victims. He added they have also informed the National Emergency Management Agency about it.

The situation is a poignant reminder of the wave of the menace of bandit activities following which the Sokoto State government penultimate Friday held an emergency special security meeting to tackle the situation. Governor Tambuwal had explained that the emergency special meeting was to “review the general security situation in the state, appraise it, assess it and come up with some strategies of containment and stamp out these very untoward activities of the bandits.”

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