

B/Haram fighters kill 30 stranded travellers in Borno

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■ The scene of an attack by suspected Boko Haram members at Auno, a town 24 kms away from Maiduguri the capital of Borno State yesterday, where 30 persons were killed. The state Governor, Prof Babagana Umara Zulum and the Garrison Commander 7 Div. Nigerian Army are seen addressing residents

- **Mother, infant among victims, others abducted**
- **All Boko Haram captives will be freed – Buhari**

Boko Haram militants on Sunday night killed 30 passengers from dozens of travellers that were forced to pass the night in Auno, a community 25 kilometres away from Maiduguri.

Some of the victims, including a mother and an infant, were reportedly burnt beyond recognition by a fire from a petrol tanker set ablaze by the terrorists.

Witnesses said the terrorists, suspected to be loyal to Abubakar Shekau, also abducted 22 people and burnt 18 vehicles and properties worth millions of naira.

Besides attacking the travellers, the insurgents also burnt shops and residential houses, witnesses said.

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How Boko Haram fighters launched a night raid on Auno

The onslaught on Auno reportedly took place at around 9.50 pm when hundreds of travellers who were stopped by soldiers manning the road around 4.45 pm on Sunday were asleep.

The travellers were allegedly forced to suspend their journeys even though it was not yet time for curfew which normally starts from 6pm and ends at 6am unless there were other issues.

Military authorities were yet to give an official account of what transpired at Auno, but Governor Babagana Zulum of Borno State had visited the scene yesterday while President Muhammadu Buhari had condemned the attack.

A member of the Civilian JTF at Auno described the siege by Boko Haram as “a coordinated attack,” saying the insurgents also carried out house-to-house search collecting mobile phones and other valuables from locals and also killed some of their victims.

He said the attackers shot Rocket Propelled Grenades (RPGs) at a tanker truck loaded with petroleum product parked at Auno, and it instantly burst into flame.

A survivor who ran into the bush when he saw a vehicle next to his on fire, said, “Within seconds, the flames spread to other trucks including some buses and cars filled with passengers that were sleeping.

“People were reluctant to go out of their vehicles because gunshots were being fired from all directions, many people could not do anything, they were helpless and that was how they lost their lives,” he said.

Another passenger whose vehicle was far from the scene of the raging flames, said, “We were caught unawares; we were in our respective vehicles and many of the passengers were asleep when the gunmen descended on them.

“I initially resisted running away thinking that soldiers would stop the attackers but when I noticed that there was no help in sight, I took to my heels.

“I couldn’t run too far from our vehicle; I hide somewhere and was praying fervently... The gunmen took their time forcing passengers to

get out of their vehicles. Voices were heard as some, probably their commanders gave directives.”

Many surviving witnesses corroborated that the attackers carefully selected their victims at gunpoint and forced them into a Toyota Hummer bus and a Gulf car and zoomed off.

Zulum assesses B/Haram carnage at Auno

Governor Zulum who visited Auno yesterday morning was told that the death toll was up to 30 even though a military commander put the figure at 10.

Speaking to the Garrison Commander of Operation Lafiya Dole, Sunday Igbinomwanhia, at the scene of the incident, Zulum said, “We have to be brutal in telling the truth...Since I was inaugurated as governor of Borno State, Boko Haram has attacked Auno six times.



■ A burnt trailer after suspected Boko Haram's attack at Auno Town in Borno State yesterday



■ Borno State Governor, Prof Babagana Umara Zulum assesses the damages caused during an attack by suspected Boko Haram at Auno Town in Borno State yesterday

“Another thing is that the military has withdrawn from Auno town. I am not undermining the capacity of the military but we have made repeated appeal for the military to establish their unit in Auno. They are here but as soon as it is 5pm, they close the gate and lock the people and go back to Maiduguri. This is not right,” he said.

In his response, the army commander said the military was committed to the protection of lives and property in the state, saying the troops were conducting clearance operation at other locations when the attack happened.

Igbinomwanhia said the military will not deliberately allow the people to be killed by insurgents. He also urged residents of the community to provide credible information to the troops in order to secure them.

Auno residents recount ‘merciless’ attack by BH

Auno residents yesterday told Governor Zulum that soldiers deployed there locked down the entrance and exit gates which they erected around a checkpoint in the village.

A witness said the travellers were prevented from proceeding to Maiduguri on reaching the village around 4.50 pm.

“The soldiers locked the town, there was no way travellers could move forward or return to Damaturu to pass the night.

“And sadly, the soldiers later left the scene and the attackers came around 9.50 pm and began shooting with RPG’s,” the witness said.

Auno, Jakana, Mainok, all of the communities along Maiduguri-Damaturu road have been attacked severally by Boko Haram in the past 10 years.

However, the terrorists have increased the frequency of their attacks on the village and surrounding communities along the highway which is so far the only road that links Maiduguri with Yobe, Bauchi, Kano and other parts of the country.

Though military authorities had on Sunday denied allegations that the terrorists have been blocking the Damaturu-Maiduguri road and denying access for commuters, the insurgents have in the last few weeks attacked the road severally and killed many travellers in the process.

At a news briefing in Maiduguri yesterday, the Theatre Commander, Operation Lafiya Dole, Major General Olusegun Adeniyi, said his troops had rescued three teenagers from Boko Haram after a fight ensued along Magumeri/Gubio road on Sunday evening.

According to General Adeniyi, the insurgents earlier abducted the two school girls from a commercial vehicle while on their way to Maiduguri.

The chairman of the Network of Civil Society Organisation in Borno State (CSOs), Ambassador Ahmed Shehu, yesterday called on security agencies to intensify security surveillance along Damaturu-Maiduguri road.

“This attack is one too many,” he said. “And considering the situation the report we received about the unfortunate event and how it unfolded. The tragedy is avoidable,” he said and called for a review of the security arrangements on the route.

Attack on Auno cowardly – Buhari

President Buhari yesterday condemned what he called the “murderous and cowardly attack on innocent passengers by the Boko Haram terrorists near Maiduguri.”

President Buhari, in a statement issued by his media aide, Garba Shehu, commiserated with the family of victims of the attack and assured them that his administration will continually frustrate the devilish operations of Boko Haram and brings it to an end.

The president said his administration was ever determined to frustrate their goal to hold Nigeria to ransom.

And in Addis Ababa, President Buhari also yesterday assured that all captives of Boko Haram would be freed.

The President Buhari spoke at a high-level breakfast dialogue on ‘Stop the War on Children Affected by Armed Conflicts, Dividend of Silencing the Guns’ at the side-line of the 33rd AU Summit in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

The programme was co-sponsored by the Governments of Nigeria, Uganda and Norway, the AU Commission and Save the Children.

“Let me categorically reassure you of the steadfast commitment of the Government of Nigeria to ensure the freedom of all kidnapped children from the shackles of Boko Haram.

“We will not relent until every child, boy, or girl, every Nigerian adult in custody of Boko Haram, is freed,” he said.

Daily Trust reports that hundreds of people including women and children are being held captive by the Shekau faction of the Boko Haram and ISWAP, another faction of the violent group.

Kaka Bolori, a former chairman of Maiduguri Metropolitan Local Government Area said the security operatives that blocked the Maiduguri road should be held responsible. “If they were not ready to pass the night with the vulnerable locals why will they block the road?” he asked. “The military should compensate the families of the dead,” he said.

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