

NEWS

Borno Massacre: Death Toll Hits 110 As 43 Buried

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OLATUNJI OMIRIN, MAIDUGURI



The number of rice farmers slaughtered by Boko Haram fighters on Saturday at Koshobe village near Maiduguri has hit 110, the United Nations Office in Nigeria, said Sunday hours after 43 of the victims were buried.

Humanitarian agencies said more bodies of the Zabarmari villagers killed by the insurgents in rice fields were being recovered from far-flung areas.

- [Boko Haram ‘slaughters’ 43 rice farmers in Borno](#)
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Edward Kallon, the United Nations Resident Coordinator and Humanitarian Coordinator in Nigeria, said in a statement on Sunday that over 110 farmers were killed by the Boko Haram assailants on Saturday.

Kallon, who is also the Resident Representative of the United Nations Development Programme in Nigeria, said they were devastated by the killing of the vulnerable civilians.

It was learnt that the 43 bodies recovered from one of the scenes of Saturday's carnage were the ones buried at the first instance, with officials saying more bodies would be buried in the coming days.



The governor attends the funeral prayer

The 43 were buried at the Zabarmari cemetery, their ancestral home, amidst wailing by their loved ones and acquaintances.

There has been outrage over the incident by citizens, who have expressed frustration over the continuous killings across the country.

Most of them took to social media to condemn the act and call on the government to take a decisive action against criminals.

The Borno attack is coming after about two weeks of continuous kidnappings and killings across the country, with the north being the worst hit region.

A development which caused the Sultan of Sokoto, Alhaji Muhammadu Sa'ad Abubakar, to describe the north as the worst place to live in now.

The Yoruba socio-political group, Afenifere and that of the northern region, Arewa Consultative Forum (ACF) also condemned the attacks, calling on the government to protect citizens.

Meanwhile, President Muhammadu Buhari has condemned the killings. In a statement through his Senior Special Assistant on Media and Publicity, Garba Shehu, the president described the act as dastardly, saying the government had given the armed forces the needed support to protect the country's population and its territory.

Mallam Abubakar Yunus, who lost two of his sons to the ungodly act, said he was arrested along with his children and that they were slaughtered in his presence.

“People were working on their farms. At our site, the whole thing started at about 10.30 am when the Boko Haram fighters, armed with guns, came wearing army uniforms and surrounded us.

“They slaughtered my sons in my presence and one of them asked me who they were to me! I replied that they

were my children. I am still in shock as to how people could be that heartless,” he said.

Another source said it was the productive population in the community that was decimated.

“Those killed were our future; they were the breadwinners. They were agile men killed in their prime; we will never recover from this because a whole generation was wiped away. They left us the elderly behind alongside their wives and vulnerable children,” he said.

Daily Trust reports that farmers including women and children who were harvesting their rice in fields around Zabarmari, just 25 kilometres away from Maiduguri, the Borno State capital, were rounded up between 9 am and noon on Saturday.

More information emerged on Sunday on how the first set of people were killed.

They were reportedly held hostage at gunpoint and railroaded to an isolated area and slaughtered, one after the other, Daily Trust gathered.

The number excludes dozens killed in different locations around Zabarmari and adjoining localities.

The areas could not be accessed on Saturday because the terrorists also set most of the farmlands on fire, credible

sources including community leaders, survivors and local vigilantes, said.



the corpses are being prepared for interment

Why the rice farmers were attacked

It was learnt that trouble started between Thursday and Friday, when some Boko Haram fighters loyal to Abubakar Shekau went to Zabarmari to forcefully get food and other needs from the villagers.

“Exploiting the villagers to get food, money and other necessities at gunpoint is one of antics of the terrorists,” a source with knowledge of what happened said.

“However, it was a bad day for one of the terrorists who went to Zabarmari on Friday and asked one of the families there to cook food for him to take to his cohorts. They agreed but when he entered the restroom, the villagers summoned courage, seized his rifle and arrested him when he came out. They later handed him over to security operatives,” the source said.

Another source said this unprecedented bravery by the villagers was what angered the terrorists who mobilized 24 hours after and descended on the farmers working on rice fields.

“The 43 rice farmers buried [Sunday] were rounded up around the same location; they were marched to another location 10 kilometres from Zabarmari and locked in a room.

“They were then called in twos and threes. The terrorists would ask them some questions and thereafter tie their hands to their backs and slit their throats. Some of the villagers were beheaded and the heads placed on their bodies. It is the height of callousness because only very few of those captured were spared during the killing spree,” the source said.

We foresaw danger after arresting BH fighters

One of the surviving villagers, who gave his name as Abubakar Salihu, said they foresaw danger after they arrested one of the Boko Haram terrorists and handed him to security operatives.

“We informed military beforehand that our members sighted Boko Haram in large numbers but nothing was done about it.

“It was a sad day for us in Zabarmari; it could have been averted but the military failed to act on the information we

gave them,” he said.

Another rice farmer, Mohammed Alhaji, said the victims were busy harvesting rice when the insurgents summoned and assembled them.

“It was a deliberate act to ensure that we do not harvest our farm produce. We need the federal government to assist us and secure our lives,” he said.

Daily Trust learnt that about two weeks ago, troops and members of the vigilante also arrested some Boko Haram fighters around the affected communities.

We’re in difficult situation – Zulum

Speaking to the bereaved community during the burial, Governor Zulum said, “First of all, accept my deepest sympathy over this carnage, once again, that affects all of us and every human being with a conscience. I am told some persons are still missing. We have been discussing with the military since yesterday. Insha Allah, the remaining people will be traced soon.

“It is disheartening that more than 40 citizens were slaughtered while they were working on their farms. Our people are in very difficult situation, they are in two different extreme conditions. On one side, if they stay at home, they may be killed by hunger and starvation; on the other, they go out to their farmlands and risk getting killed by the insurgents.

“This is very sad. We are still appealing to the federal government to ensure recruitment of more of our youths in the CJTF and hunters into the Nigerian military and the civil defence so that they can form part of the agro rangers that will protect farmers. We need many boots to protect farmlands and our youths understand the terrain. We will not lose hope because we have to remain optimistic about ending the insurgency,” he said.

We’re devastated – UN

The United Nations Coordinator, Edward Kallon, said yesterday that he was outraged and horrified by the attack on civilians “carried out by non-state armed groups in villages near Borno State capital.”

“At least 110 civilians were ruthlessly killed and many others were wounded in this attack. Reports we are receiving are indicating that these innocent farmers were the victims of this callous violence.

“I extend my sincere condolences to the families of the civilians who lost their lives in this atrocious attack. I also wish a speedy recovery to those who were wounded in the incident.

“We have also received reports that several women may have been kidnapped. I call for their immediate release and return to safety.

“My thoughts are also with the rural communities in the area, who are shocked by the brutality of yesterday’s attack and fear for their safety.

“The entire UN system and the humanitarian community working to provide life-saving and development assistance to the most vulnerable in Borno State are outraged by the incident. Such direct attacks against innocent civilians jeopardize the ability for the most vulnerable people to survive the adversity they are facing, and which we are striving to alleviate.

“The incident is the most violent direct attack against innocent civilians this year. I call for the perpetrators of this heinous and senseless act to be brought to justice,” he said.

Also, the Chairman of Northeast Civil Society Forum, Ambassador Ahmed Shehu, lamented that the highest response from Abuja will not be more than a statement of condemnation and letter of condolences and “one-off support with no strategic plan to mitigate future occurrence”.

“We know what we are going through. We are so insecure in the North that people are losing hope,” he said.

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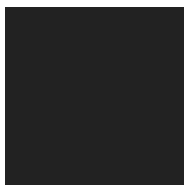
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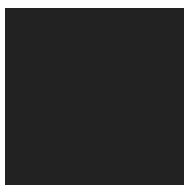
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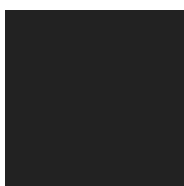
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