

# Residents Recount Ordeals As Gunmen Kill Scores In Benue

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Governor Samuel Ortom of Benue State



By Our Reporters

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**Dozens of people have been killed by suspected gunmen who stormed many communities in Katsina-Ala Local Government areas of Benue State between Saturday and Sunday.**

While local authorities said at least 100 bodies were recovered from some villages, a witness from one of the affected villages said he counted 70 dead bodies in the area he lived, while another man said over 150 people were killed in his locality.

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Some officials alleged that the attacks were perpetrated by some militants loyal to the notorious Terwase Akwaza, popularly known as 'Gana', who was killed by Nigerian troops in September 2020.

They alleged that the attacks were carried out in cohort with suspected herders.

But the Miyetti Allah Cattle Breeders Association of Nigeria (MACBAN) said its members were not part of the attacks.

The Benue State Police Public Relations Officer (PPRO), DSP Catherine Anene, said she was yet to receive any report on the incident.

**'We recovered over 100 dead bodies'**

The Chairman of Katsina-Ala LGA, Alfred Atera, told journalists in Makurdi on Monday, that over 100 people were killed during the weekend in the four wards of Mbayongo, Yooyo, Utange and Mbatyula/Mberek in a coordinated manner.

Atera said security personnel, though did their best were allegedly overwhelmed by the combined forces of Gana boys and herders.

“More than 100 people have been killed in different places. Some people were able to claim the corpses for burial. I told the military that the attackers have developed a strategy; they are not attacking one place, if they attack a place now, the next thing you hear is that they are in Yooyo and at the same time they are attacking Utange.

“So, the military is going here and there. Before they could get to a particular place, the attackers would have finished and got to another point, that is the situation in Katsina-Ala.

“There is no military connivance, but I am suspecting the existing bandits here and I think they are trying to win cheap popularity. They are conniving with the Fulani herders so that we (government) will consider them, which we have refused to do. The Gana remnants are conniving with them to cause the havoc and unrest in our area,” Atera said.

Speaking further, his spokesman, Tertsea Benga, listed the initial communities attacked between Saturday and Sunday to include: Vingir, Tse Nyipila and Tse Guji all in Mbayongo ward, adding that the attackers proceeded to Kenvanger in Mbatyula council ward and that by Sunday afternoon, most of the corpses were recovered from the bush.

Before the latest attack, Benga recalled that half of the communities in Yooyo council ward were earlier sacked by the alleged armed invaders who killed many people.

### **It's not true, we've no hand in Benue attacks – MACBAN**

Responding to the alleged complicity, the MACBAN in Benue State disassociated itself from the killings.

Its secretary, Ibrahim Galma, told our correspondent by telephone that though they heard about the killings going on in Katsina-Ala villages over the weekend, the association does not know the people behind the killings or their collaborators.

Galma said at present, there were no Fulani in Katsina-Ala, Kwande, Ukum and other LGAs around that axis of the state.

He added that as an association, they heard of the incident like every other person and that they also heard that some Fulani had been killed. He said the crisis was ongoing around Benue/ Taraba border.

“There are crises ongoing there and many Fulani are affected. I heard that a large number of people are even taken away by suspected bandits. I won’t be able to tell the real stories but security agencies and Taraba State government are in the best position to do so.

“There are issues there being perpetrated by bandits and to the best of my knowledge, there are no Fulani there. We can’t tell whether the Fulani are involved in what is happening in that boundary area. We cannot account for them because they are not from our state,” Galma said.

An audio circulated on WhatsApp purportedly leaked a conversation between Azonto, the militiaman alleged to have taken over from Gana and an alleged Fulani man identified as Dauda.

The audio, which could not be immediately verified, ‘established’ a link between the local militia and Fulani herders as Dauda was heard admonishing the said Azonto to ensure that no Fulani man should be killed or his cow cut whenever there were clashes between herders and farmers in his (Azonto) controlled turf.

Azonto on his part gave assurances that he would maintain the relationship his late boss, Gana, had with Dauda’s people.

The two spoke in Tiv language for 11 minutes and 46 seconds discussing banditry in the area.

### **Residents recount horrific experiences**

Residents of the affected communities have recounted their experiences.

Some of them, who spoke to our correspondent by telephone on Monday, claimed that more villagers were still missing while the actual number of those killed could not be ascertained as several communities were currently under attacks by armed invaders.

A resident of one of the affected village, David Zungwe, said his Kenvanger community in Mbatyula Council Ward was completely ravaged by the invaders who besieged them on Saturday.

“They killed more than 70 people in my community, many others are still missing and I can’t even say where some of my relations are right now.

“I am talking to you from a hideout right now. Everybody has left my village. The few people who sneaked in today (Monday) came under attack by cattle herders and seven persons were killed,” he alleged.

A clergy of an NKST Church, Rev. Jacob Bende, described the attacks as horrific, stressing that in his Atumbe village and surrounding communities in Mberev Council Ward, over 150 people were killed while many houses were burnt.

Bende added that many of his church members in Aker were missing following Saturday’s invasion which caused pandemonium.

“They (attackers) were moving from one place to another. As they trekked along the villages, they attacked and killed people they come across on the way. It was such a coordinated thing so that everybody was on the run and we have no one to intervene for us.

“Our farms were destroyed; lives and property are gone. My members are taken away and now we have fled to Tor Donga, a border town with Taraba State for refuge.”

Also, Josh Nyipila, of Tse-Atsethem in Mbayongo Council Ward, whose uncle was killed while struggling to flee, said it was disheartening that the invaders could unleash such terror on the locals at midday.

“They (attackers) came unexpectedly in broad daylight and in a highly coordinated manner. By Sunday, an attempt was made to quickly go and bury him after his body was found but while the few youths who went to scout for the fallen bodies were in the process of burial, the attackers came back and were shooting heavily so they ran away.

“When the shooting stopped, they again mobilised and went to the village to pick up the corpse during which they also identified few more corpses and took it away. As we speak, no unarmed person can go there.

“Families don’t know where other members are and sadly, there is ongoing killing in the area. All the villagers have fled to Tor Donga for refuge,” Nyipila said.

### **Arm yourself with guns – Ortom**

Governor Samuel Ortom has said he would no longer announce the death of those killed by armed invaders.

The governor, according to a report written by one of his aides, Tahav Agerzua, spoke at an interdenominational church service organised by the Christian Association of Nigeria on Sunday evening at the Chapel of Grace in Government House, Makurdi, to round off a seven-day prayer and fasting programme for peace in the state.

Governor Ortom also reiterated his call on the people to defend themselves. “I will no longer announce the deaths of those killed by Fulani herdsmen. Rise up and defend yourselves with weapons not prohibited by law, bows and arrows, spears, knives, and similar ones,” the governor was quoted to have said.

### **Seven killed in Plateau reprisal**

Seven people including teenagers were attacked and killed in Dong area of Jos South Local Government Area of Plateau State.

*Daily Trust* reports that the deceased were attacked in their residence around 11.30 pm on Sunday when they were asleep.

The incident happened less than 24 hours after two herders were killed around the Rantya area on Saturday and two others in Kuru village of Jos South on Sunday. One person was still missing in Maiyanga village of Bassa Local Government Area of the state since Thursday.

More than 52 cattle were also shot dead in separate attacks in the said LGAs.

Speaking on the latest attack, a resident of the area told *Daily Trust* that the attackers first killed a family member and later attacked another family and killed six people, including two teenagers.”

Contacted, the spokesman for the Plateau State Police Command, Ubah Gabriel, said they received a distress call that yet to be identified gunmen invaded Dong village and killed seven persons.

“A combined team of Policemen, STF, Vigilante operatives led by the Deputy Commissioner of Police, Department of Operation, raced swiftly to the scene but the hoodlums had already fled back into the bush.

“Investigation is ongoing, frantic effort is on to arrest the fleeing suspects. Meanwhile, security has been beefed up in that area to prevent escalation of violence,” he said.

The Commissioner of Information and Communication, Dan Manjang in a statement described the act as barbaric, callous and a desperate attempt to rupture the peace and security of the state.

While commiserating with families that lost loved ones and valuables in the two separate attacks, Manjang said Governor Simon Lalong was deeply distressed by the incidents and had vowed to ensure that the cherished values of peace and security and the sanctity of lives remained sacrosanct in the state.

The commissioner reiterated that the capacity of the security agencies for rapid response and intervention will be boosted once the approved 50 patrol vehicles and 200 security motorcycles were supplied.

*From Hope A. Emmanuel (Makurdi), Ado A. Musa (Jos) & Terkula Igidi (Abuja)*

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