

How fighter jet killed locals in Yobe

From Ibrahim Baba Saleh (Damaturu)

• Mistook farmers, traders for terrorists

At least eight persons have been killed on Wednesday in an aerial bombardment on Buhari village in Yunusari Local Government Area of Yobe State, witnesses and families of victims said.

Ali Lawan, a resident, told *Daily Trust* that the incident occurred in the morning when a military aircraft fired at the villagers.

He said residents were departing their farms and others heading for the Geidam weekly market when the mishap occurred.

Geidam market, famous for grains and livestock, draws traders and buyers from many parts of Yobe and neighbouring Jigawa, Bauchi and parts of Borno State.

Lawan said the aircraft with spot of ash and military camouflaged colour approached from the eastern part of the town and fired from east to the west.

Besides those killed by what some people described as "explosives", men, women and children were injured.

"People were really confused on who launched the attack because the Boko Haram attackers that we all know had never come with aircraft.

"When shots were fired from the aircraft, people ran helter-skelter. Sadly, some were killed while others sustained injuries," Lawan said.

He said 20 people

including men, women and children were being treated at Geidam General Hospital.

"Those with serious injuries were referred to Specialist Hospital, Damaturu, and University of Maiduguri Teaching Hospital for treatment," he said.

'Attack must be in error'

But a source in Geidam who does not want to be named because of the security implication of the matter said the military aircraft was on a mission to dislodge ISWAP terrorists that had been hibernating in some villages in the outskirts of Geidam.

He listed the villages to include Buhari, Bulabulin, Matari, Malari and Kajinjiri.

"I think the shooting from the aircraft was an error," he said.

"The military and sister agencies had carried out serious surveillance and clearly established that ISWAP members were living in those communities.

"They were more or less using the locals as human shield, making it difficult for the ground troops to carry out serious operation or the air force to launch aerial attacks," he said.

Another source said the aircraft might have mistaken the villagers who were heading to the market for terrorists.

The Chairman of Yunusari Local Government Area, Alhaji Bukar Gaji, confirmed the incident

to our correspondent.

"Yes, it happened. We received the sad news today and the victims are currently in the hospital receiving treatment.

"We cannot say where the aircraft came from; whether from Niger Republic or Nigerian military, we don't know. The actual picture can only be given by security forces," he said.

Contacted, Yobe State Police Public Relations Officer, Mr Dungus Abdulkarim, said the aircraft might have been dispatched for military operations and the police had no official statement on the issue.

The acting Army spokesman of Sector 2 Operation Hadin Kai, Damaturu, Lt Kennedy Anyewau, could not be reached for comment.

Contacted, spokesman of the Air Force, Commodore Edward Gabkwet, said the incident is being investigated.

Yunusari, a local government in Northern Yobe, shares a border with Niger Republic.

It is not far from Geidam Local Government Area which had been occupied by terrorists in the past and symbols of authority destroyed.

On January 17, 2017, a Nigerian Air Force jet mistakenly bombed an internally displaced persons' camp near the Cameroonian border in Rann, Borno State, killing at least 115 people.