

Boko Haram kills 35 fishermen in Borno

From Tunji Omirin, Hamisu Kabiru Matazu (Maiduguri) & Idowu Isamotu (Abuja)

At least 35 people, who went on a fishing expedition, have been shot dead by Boko Haram fighters in Ngala Local Government Area of Borno State.

Residents and families of the deceased said they were devastated by the attack and called for more security in the area to save them from attacks by terrorists.

The Borno State Government and the Dikwa Emirate Council have also confirmed the killings and extended condolences to the families of the deceased and prayed for the speedy recovery of those injured.

Multiple sources told the Daily Trust yesterday that the Boko Haram fighters had, on several occasions, warned the fishermen to stay away from their (terrorists') "zones" to forestall backlash, but considering that they had to go out and look for what to eat, the locals had no option than to go for fishing and other endeavours.

On Wednesday, the assailants unleashed terror on the fishermen who went out in earnest in search of livelihood.

One of the fishermen, who escaped the attack, said the terrorists surrounded them near the riverbanks and opened fire on them, killing at least 35 people and injuring some; while many others were missing.

Another survivor told our correspondent that the incident occurred at Mukdolo under Ngala Local Government bordering Dikwa village, adding that "unfortunately all the victims were IDPs from Dikwa town."

He said the terrorists "rode on motorbikes from a nearby forest and surrounded us at riverbanks and they said they have warned us to stay away from there."

"They started shooting at all angles and only three of us made it back to Dikwa. I can tell you more than 35 people were killed. As I speak, many are yet to return to Dikwa town," he said.

Quoting sources, the AFP news agency gave a higher figure, saying that a dozen militants opened fire on the fishermen outside Guggo village, 18 kilometres (12 miles) from the town of Dikwa.

"We recovered 37 bodies last night along the river bank and



■ The Shehu of Dikwa, Alhaji Ibrahim Ibn Umar Ibrahim El-Kanemi during a condolence visit to families of fishermen killed by Boko Haram in Borno

Photo: Dikwa Emirate

nearby bushes," one of the sources, Babakura Kolo, said.

"The figure is not exhaustive and the search for more bodies is ongoing in surrounding bushes," he said.

The fishermen were sorting out their catch of the day on the bank of a river when they were ambushed. Some scampered for safety, said Umar Ari, who gave the same death toll.

"The terrorists pursued the fishermen as they tried to flee, shooting them dead but three managed to escape and alerted Dikwa about the attack," Ari said.

It was not clear how many had gone out fishing that day, said a local resident, Abdullahi Kyari, who also gave the same toll.

Corroborating the account, Zagazola Makama, a counter-insurgency expert and security analyst in the Lake Chad region, said nine among the victims managed to flee and three sustained bullet wounds.

"They asked them to lie down. Thereafter, they used their fishing nets and wrapped them before they started torturing them. After they became unconscious, they opened fire on them, killing them instantly."

"The bodies of the 26 farmers were later recovered during search and rescue operation by troops who received the news from victims who fled the attack," Makama added.

When contacted last night, the Director, Defence Media Operations, Maj.-Gen. Musa Danmadami, said the victims could not have been IDPs as reported because they were supposed to be in a camp, not to go fishing.

The senior military officer, however, promised to find out the details of the incident and get back to our correspondent. He was yet to do so at the time of filing this report.

We're sad - Zulum, Dikwa monarch

When contacted, Isa Gusau, the spokesman of Governor Babagana Zulum, said the government received the news of the attack with shock.

"The governor has received with pain, a report about the killing of over 30 fishermen in Mukdolo village within Ngala local government area. Most of them, below 30 years of age, were said to have gone fishing early morning yesterday."

He said 28 of the fishermen were killed instantly; while others, who sustained gunshots, were later rescued by the military.

"Unfortunately, two of the rescued six also died from injuries. This means about 30 died while four persons survived the unfortunate attack. The zonal coordinator of the Borno State Emergency Management Agency (SEMA) for the Borno Central

senatorial zone, Rawa Gana Modu led officials of the agency to attend the funeral of the deceased. The State Government is monitoring the recovery of the four survivors at hospitals in Maiduguri.

"Governor Zulum is holding talks with heads of security establishments towards enhancing security measures that aim to forestall future occurrence," Gusau said.

In a statement yesterday, the Shehu of Dikwa, Alhaji Ibrahim Ibn Umar Ibrahim El-Kanemi, also expressed sadness over the killing of the fishermen.

The statement, signed by Zannah Wawurma of Dikwa, Abubakar mala Gajibo, quoted the Dikwa monarch as describing the incident as worrisome and praying for the repose of the souls of the deceased.

He said a security meeting was convened in Dikwa consisting of traditional rulers, religious leaders, community leaders, and security agents where it was resolved that henceforth, nobody should be out of the town for any business venture without the permission of the security personnel.

Our correspondent reports that recently, amid a series of milestones by the military on terrorists in the North East and other parts of the country, there have been "isolated attacks" on locals along the shores of Lake

Chad and fringes of Sambisa even as such incidences are rarely reported.

While Boko Haram and rival ISWAP have been running what could be termed a "war of attrition"; the two militant groups have been targeting the civilian population for a long time.

A security expert and retired military officer, Salihu Bakhari, suggested the need for the military high command to up its game ahead of the rainy season.

According to him, this is the right time to decimate the enemy because once the rains set in, it would be difficult to sustain offensives around "Timbuktu Triangle and Sambisa Forest."

Bakhari also advocated additional incentives for "experienced commanders and troops" to end the nearly 14-year-old Boko Haram insurgency in the North East.

"The progress recorded by our troops is evident in the way and manner hundreds of thousands of people have gone back to their ancestral homes."

"However, over the years, we keep recording setbacks once it is a rainy season because there would be no serious operation throughout such a period. We cannot continue this way. Our troops should be able to fight all year round to end this menace," he said.

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