

# Over 40 killed as militia groups clash in Benue

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No fewer than 45 people, including a family of seven, have been killed after rival militia gangs clashed in the Gbagir community of Ukum LGA in Benue State.

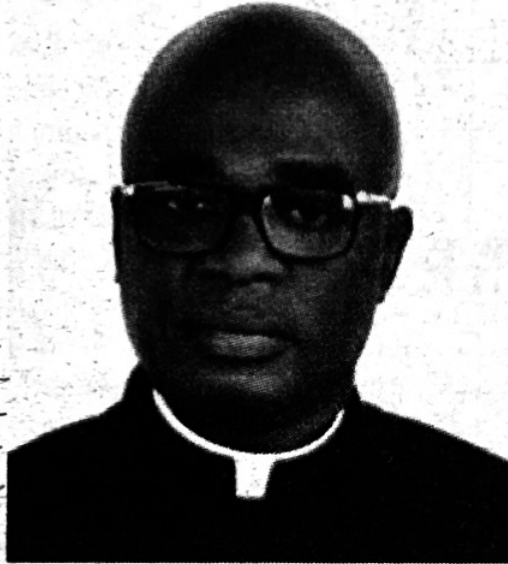
The incident happened on Tuesday, according to residents.

The residents said though most of those killed were suspected to be local militia members, there were however at least 12 innocent farmers who were caught in the web of the gun battle between the feuding groups - "Full Fire" and "Chain."

A traditional ruler in the area, who preferred not to be named, told journalists in Makurdi that trouble started on Tuesday morning after a Benue militia leader in Ukum LGA, allegedly kidnapped another Taraba militia leader, one Alhaji Gana, and his family members from neighbouring Chinkai community in Wukari LGA of Taraba State.

The community leader alleged that after kidnapping the victims, they demanded N100 million ransom but only N5 million was paid.

"After collecting the money, he (the kidnapper) killed the hostages. The murder of the hostages sparked outrage among his gang members in Taraba State. This happened over the weekend.



■ Governor Hyacinth Alia

"What followed was that another militia gang leader in Ukum now went and joined forces with the militia gang in Taraba to help them eliminate the rival gang in Ukum that killed their leader, Alhaji Gana.

"The combined forces of the two militia gangs started moving into the bushes of Gbagir in their hundreds from Sunday to sack the gang that killed Alhaji Gana. And on Tuesday morning, the bloody fight ensued.

"From what we gathered was that over 45 persons, who were mainly bandits, were killed, though we have a record of about 12 farmers who were caught in the crossfire. Over 30 others were injured while some

are still missing," the community leader narrated.

The Benue State Security Council and the Force Commander of Operation Whirl Stroke (OPWS), Major General Sunday Igbinomwanhia, confirmed the killings on Wednesday.

Briefing reporters in Makurdi, the state's deputy governor, Sam Ode, flanked by members of the state Security Council, said the incident was purely an unholy affair of rival militia groups.

Major General Igbinomwanhia, on his part, said, "A clash between two militia groups over what we don't know resulted in the death of their foot soldiers. We have been there initially and saw dead bodies. About 30 people were killed on both sides (militia groups)."

Meanwhile, the Senate on Wednesday urged the state governor, Hyacinth Alia, to use security votes to end killings in Benue. This followed a motion by Senator Emmanuel Memga Udende (APC Benue) during plenary.

Udende, in the motion, said 50 people were killed in Katsina-Ala, Kwande and Ukum LGAs of the state in fresh attacks by marauders on Tuesday and urged the Senate to respond to the killings.

Contributing to the debate, Senator Ahmad Lawan (APC Yobe) said, "We need to insist on value for money. We have given

out more resources, we want to see a better security environment, otherwise, when we have no KPIs, the resources may simply be filtered away."

Senators Enyinnaya Abaribe (APGA, Abia), Adamu Aliero (PDP, Kebbi) and others expressed displeasure over the spate of killings in the country and called for collaborative action.

Senate President Godswill Akpabio said "His (Alia's) primary responsibility is to use the security vote to ensure the security of lives and property in Benue State.

"If 50 people are killed and communities are being attacked, we would expect that the governor cries out or marshals out plans with security operatives in Benue State to see what they can do before bringing the issue to the president.

"I want to also assure you that President Bola Ahmed Tinubu, though he has not stayed long in office, is very concerned and supportive of the armed forces.

"And by the time the Senate meets with him in conjunction with the House of Representatives, we believe that the resolutions that we will come up with will benefit the entire country.

"I assure the good people of the areas affected, that this matter is now before the floor of the Senate and we are taking serious action with the presidency to ensure that normalcy is restored in those areas."