

Villagers flee as gunmen kill many in Benue

From Hope Abah, Makurdi

Residents of several villages in Katsina-Ala and Logo local government areas of Benue State yesterday fled their homes after gunmen killed many persons during a raid.

Sources in the affected communities said at least 30 people were gunned down and many others injured.

The villages, which were invaded on Sunday and in the wee hours of yesterday, had been attacked several times by local militias in the past.

Locals said 10 bodies were recovered from different Katsina-Ala villages; while 20 deaths were recorded in Logo area bringing the total number of casualties to 30.

Some residents told *Daily Trust* on the telephone yesterday that they had fled their homes and were hiding in the bushes.

One of them, who gave his name simply as David, said: "As we speak, I am right in the bush with other villagers. They have killed many people in my Mbatulya council ward of Katsina-Ala LGA. In my village in particular, they killed three people. Villagers have deserted their homes. Some of them are now moving to the city."

Another resident, who gave his name simply as Francis, said: "Everyone is running for safety in the affected areas. I can say with certainty that massive killing is ongoing in some villages of Katsina-Ala LGA right now."

Similarly, a cleric in the area who did not want his name mentioned, said: "The residents were living on the edge. The attackers are killing innocent people at will, destroying properties, maiming and inflicting grievous injuries on people."

"We couldn't sleep in our places here yesterday (Sunday). Many people are still in the hospital right now. People were killed and others



■ Benue State governor, Hyacinth Alia



■ Inspector-General of Police, Kayode Egbetokun

are running away. Currently, villagers are on the run. The threat is too much", the cleric said.

We lost many people – LG chair

The Chairman of Katsina-Ala LGA, Justine Shaku, told our correspondent on the telephone that many people were killed in his area and valuable property destroyed.

"Yes, another incident of attack was reported to have taken place this morning (Monday) at about 2am. The information is that many of them heavily armed stormed Adabo village and Tse Gwebe settlement in Utange Council Ward of Shitile in Katsina -Ala LGA," he said.

He said the reports he received so far showed that six corpses had been recovered from two communities, noting that the casualties could be more.

"Armed herders invaded two of my council ward and killed people

- three persons from Mbatulya council ward and three persons from Utange council ward. They injured so many people and destroyed their farmlands. Today (Monday), the communities are in disarray," he said.

Shaku, reflecting on the many troubles of his council areas which included armed invasions and local militias terrorising the area, explained that: "We have been able to subdue the local militias but not completely eliminated. However, it has significantly improved such that people are moving on with their normal lives."

"But this invaders' issue has completely taken us back", he said.

A community leader at Logo, Chief Joseph Anawah, said: "There was attack on Azege settlement and environ of Tombo Council Ward on Sunday at about 7am by armed herders during which at least 20 people were killed."

"There were over 300 well-armed men suspected to be militia.

This invasion was carried out in the morning hours and the invaders were clearly seen by the locals.

"The security operatives on ground were unable to repel the attack because of their (attackers') number and the sophisticated weapons they were carrying. It was not until the arrival of a military jet before they were able to subdue them to retreat."

"Over 20 corpses were discovered, while the search for more missing persons is ongoing", he said.

A resident of Logo, who preferred anonymity, said the attack on Ayilamo community of Tombo Council ward could only be imagined, adding that "14 bodies were recovered at the spot before other bodies were later found in nearby bushes."

The Chairman of Logo LGA, Clement Kav, alleged that the invaders were claiming ownership of his domain, Tombo.

"They attacked the Tombo

council ward and killed 17 person and injured 37. The governor has already mobilised more security to the area and peace has been restored. No case of missing persons for now," he said.

Investigation ongoing – Police

The Police Public Relations Officer in the state, Catherine Anene, said five bodies were recovered, but stressed that investigation was ongoing.

Anene said: "I am not aware of Katsina-Ala incident but I am aware of Logo. Five corpses were recovered. Policemen have been deployed to the area. Investigation is ongoing."

On who are the perpetrators of the attacks, the police spokesperson said: No, I don't have an idea of people carrying out the attacks.

"Investigation is ongoing and until they officially unveil their investigation, I may not have the authority to speak on it. When they unveil what is happening there, investigators will communicate it outcome, and then I can speak", she said.

Our operatives fully on ground – State govt

When contacted, the Special Adviser to the Governor on Internal Security, Joseph Har, said the established homeland security operatives were fully on ground as a step towards curbing the insecurity in the state.

The Director-General of the Bureau of Homeland Security, Air Commodore Jacob Gbamwuan (retd), could not be reached as of the time of filing this report.

Jonathan Agbidiye, a lawmaker representing Katsina-Ala East Constituency in the State House of Assembly, told our correspondent that he was busy and would call back, but did not do so.