

Bandits kill foreigner, police escort on Benue-Taraba road

BANDITS operating on the Benue-Taraba border yesterday morning killed a mobile policeman and an unidentified European travelling on the Takum route.

The incident occurred on a day that Governor Gabriel Suswam of Benue State and his Taraba State counterpart, Danbaba Sontai, met to

*From Simeon Nwakaudu
(Makurdi)
and Charles Akpeji
(Jalingo)*

initiate measures to stop killings on the disputed areas between the two states. President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua had directed them to check communal clashes in their states.

Security along the dreaded road was tightened when news filtered into Katsina Ala in Benue that militiamen on that route had accosted a Sports Utility Van conveying the European and his orderly, a mobile policeman.

Both were reportedly killed at a village near the deserted Dogon Gawa

Town.

Before the peace meeting led by the two governors commenced, soldiers and mobile policemen combed the area for hours, to ward off militiamen believed to be hiding in the hinterland of the adjoining communities in the disputed area.

Addressing the meet-
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ing, Suswam said that Yar'Adua wrote a letter to him and Sontai to ensure the return of peace to the area. As at last week, about 200 people were feared killed in the crisis that had engulfed the area.

He said: "The President has written to us twice on the killings in this area. People who have no ability to create anything have totally destroyed the area and killed people without provocation. They have destroyed the peace of this area and that is unacceptable. Those who perpetrate killings in this area are criminals, not militiamen as claimed in certain quarters."

Suswam said that since the crisis assumed a dangerous dimension, nobody can claim to having seen the body of a militiaman killed in the conflict which involve the Tiv and Kuteb.

The governor said that the President had directed them to set up a joint military and police patrol team along the Katsina Ala-Takum Road to weed out bandits operating in the area. He said that Yar'Adua also mandated the joint team to move into villages in the areas to arrest the hoodlums and restore peace to the border communities.

Suswam threatened that the state government would arrest community

leaders, where the bandits operate. He noted that without the collaboration of the community leaders, it would be difficult for the hoodlums to operate freely.

He said: "Militiamen are housed by community leaders. Henceforth, we shall arrest any community leader in whose area militiamen operate from. Without their active collaboration, it would be difficult for these militiamen to operate in this area."

In his address, Sontai pledged the commitment of his government to the restoration of peace along the border.

Sontai appealed to the warring parties to return to their pre-crisis peace-

ful state, where they co-operated with each other and ensured the development of the area.

He said: "I am ashamed of the ugly situation that we have found ourselves in this border area. It is unfortunate that people who inter-marry and live together are now killing each other. We shall stem this ugly tide."

Highlight of the peace meeting was a pledge by the leaders of the two warring tribes to sheathe the sword. Mr. Thomas Deggar stood for the Tiv while Bawa Buki represented the Kuteb.

The Kuteb-Tiv crisis is a fall-out of a disagreement over economic trees situated along the disputed area.