

NEWS.

Amid Boko Haram Onslaught, Gusau Pledges Secure Nation

Written by Madu Onuorah, Abuja and Njadvara Musa, Maiduguri

Category: National Hits: 71 • Print



• More Killed In Insurgents' Attacks

AS Nigerians ponder the war against Boko Haram insurgency and general insecurity in the country, and whether the armed forces are actually gaining the upper hand, Minister of Defence, Gen. Aliyu Mohammed

Gusau, has pledged to work assiduously towards a safe and secure Nigeria.

This assurance came just as Police authorities Friday at the Borno State Command headquarters in Maiduguri, confirmed that 17 residents were killed and houses torched in a second attack on Mafa town by gunmen suspected to be members of the Boko Haram sect. Members of the sect had earlier on Wednesday visited mayhem on the same community.

The second attack, the police said, took place barely an hour after Governor Kashim Shettima paid a condolence and sympathy visit to victims of the insurgency that claimed 35 lives, including three policemen last Sunday.

On Thursday, suspected sect members attacked traders at Wala village on the Maiduguri-Gwoza road, killing seven and injuring of five others around 6.30am.

Wala is border village with Cameroun and 125 kilometres southeast of Maiduguri, the state capital.

An eyewitness and resident of Gwoza, Tadah Hahe, said the traders were travelling in a bus and a tricycle when the gunmen ambushed them at the village.

Gusau gave the assurance Friday when he formally resumed duties along with Minister of State for Defence, Mr. Musliu Obanikoro, at the Ministry of Defence.

He said, after taking over from the former Supervising Minister of Defence and Minister of Information, Mr. Labaran Maku: "The security challenges are evidently daunting, but surmountable.

"With the help of Almighty Allah and our collective resolve and determination, we will get to the destination that will give Nigerians the confidence that the country is indeed a safe place for everyone."

Maku, speaking just before handing over to Gusau, tasked the military to continue to work for democracy, saying Nigeria has no future outside democracy.

Admitting "serious security challenges in the country," Maku stated: "Our armed forces have been doing a great job. For many people outside, who see the sporadic killings taking place in the last two weeks, the impression is that the armed forces are doing nothing.

"Even a state governor had the misfortune of indiscretion when he said it would appear the armed forces of Nigeria are not capable of fighting the terrorists. I think that was serious indiscretion.

"And I can forgive that, because maybe he did not quite know the deeper work that was going on and is still going on in the Northeast."

He added: "I am aware that in the last four weeks, there has been a lot of pressure on the terrorists, because the armed forces have been going directly to their bases, and that is why we are seeing a lot of those sporadic attacks, which comes sometimes out of frustration and anger.

"I know so much is going on and it is not something that we will talk on the pages of newspapers.

"I commend the armed forces for facing the challenges head on. And we must change the story as quickly as we can, because it is crucial for this country."

Borno State Commissioner of Police, Mr. Tanko Lawal, said the actual number of casualties in Sunday's attacks on Mafa could not be assessed until Friday, when his men in the field confirmed the death of 17 civilians and a security personnel.

He stated that the remaining few houses from last Sunday's attacks were also torched by the hoodlums at about 4pm last Wednesday.

The Guardian also learnt that the double tragedy occurred when the police patrol team clashed with insurgents travelling to Marte council area of the state.

A top military officer said there was fierce battle between the terrorists and soldiers heading northwards that lasted for half an hour, just as another set of insurgents stormed Mafa town.

Some residents who fled to Maiduguri also told journalists that the terrorists had shortly after the first attack vowed to return.

"They told us that they would not only level Mafa, but would wipe it out completely, and it seems they have accomplished their mission," said Usman Abba, a resident.

He added: "Thirty minutes after the traders boarded the bus and tricycle at Gwoza Motor Park, we were shocked and terrified that our people had been killed by the insurgents that emerged from the Sambisa Forest at dawn to terrorise our people here.

"The gunmen came in a Volkswagen Golf car and two motorcycles and opened fire on the traders, killing seven of them travelling to Barawa Market near the border with Cameroun."

He revealed that some of the traders who attempted to flee were shot dead by the insurgents. The injured persons, he disclosed, were taken to the hospital in Gwoza for treatment, while the bodies of victims were deposited at the hospital morgue for identification before their burials Thursday.

Lawal confirmed yesterday that a gang of armed hoodlums ambushed and killed seven traders travelling to a border market in Gwoza council. He said no arrests has been made by either the military or police.

Meanwhile, the military Friday said it recovered some weapons while repelling an attack from the terrorists along the country's border with Chad. A statement by the Director of Defence Information, Maj-Gen. Chris Olukolade, said the Multi-National Joint Task Force (MNJTF) confronted the terrorists as they tried to overrun markets in communities on the outskirts of Monguno and NNPC at New Marte in Borno State. Olukolade said over 50 assorted grenades and 11 AK 47 rifles were recovered from the fleeing terrorists. He said more assaults and encounters were in progress as intelligence sources confirmed the routes being used by the fleeing terrorists, noting that soldiers had been directed to sustain aggressive patrols in certain areas where terrorists' actions were anticipated. The Defence spokesman stated that cordon and search operations were ongoing and patrols had been increased to forestall further attacks. He added: "Interrogation of captured terrorists from various locations has been yielding useful information as to their mode of operations. "Among those in custody is a lead specialist in butchering human beings, who insisted he did not use firearms, but daggers and cutlasses for his assignment."