

# Gunmen Kill 24, Injure 18, Burn Houses In Benue

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Over 24 people have been killed, 18 others injured and several houses set ablaze by suspected armed herdsmen who invaded four communities in Kwande local government area of Benue State.

LEADERSHIP gathered that the attack occurred at Mbaav, Yariwa, Udeku in Mbaikyo council ward and Kpe-Mkar communities where over 500 houses were reportedly set ablaze by the hoodlums.

A fleeing survivor, Lawrence Akerigba, told journalists in Makurdi, the state capital, that scores of people have deserted their homes at Mbaikyor, Iyariwa, Udeku and Kpe-Mkar settlement areas, and Abande communities and are now taking shelter in Jato- Aka

According to him, the insurgents have also blocked the road between Udeku and Iyariwa leading to the big palm oil market in Anwase and Abande in Mbaikyo council ward of Kwande local government area.

“Traders who were going to buy palm oil at Anwase and Abande could not access the market because the armed herders who blocked the road were shooting sporadically in the air,” he said.

Akerigba who had also to flee his community, said the attack was unprovoked, and that the

militants invaded the affected communities through Kashimbilla, a border town between the neighbouring Taraba and Benue States, with some of them coming in via the Cameroon border.

He said the herders came in with herds of cattle for grazing and eventually started shooting at anyone in sight and as well destroying crops yet to be harvested and even stealing crops stored in food barns.

He said, "These armed herdsmen have also set several houses ablaze at Udeku village in Yaav council ward, and set ablaze Tse-Kosu. They also blocked Waya-Kashimbila Road that connects Benue and Taraba states.

"Some of the displaced persons are currently taking refuge at Jato Aka town, four kilometres away from the scene of the attack."

According to him, all farming areas are no longer safe as the herdsmen have taken over the entire villages, adding that the presence of security personnel stationed in the areas does not help matters as they watch the attack and killing helplessly.

He said the injured persons are receiving treatment at Nyihemba and Jato-Aka health care centres.

Our correspondent reports that the incident occurred after the State Security Council meeting presided over by Governor Hyacinth Alia had given the armed herdsmen, who had invaded the state in droves with herds of cattle, an ultimatum to leave the state.