

Boko Haram kills 48 in attacks near Chibok



Two attacks by Boko Haram gunmen killed 30 people near Chibok, the town where the Islamists kidnapped more than 200 schoolgirls last month, witnesses said yesterday.

The first attack on Monday afternoon killed 10 in Shawa, seven kilometres from Chibok, some residents told AFP on condition of anonymity.

But another report by Associated Press (AP) claimed that 48 people died from the attacks.

Gunmen then stormed the nearby village of Alagarno late Tuesday and stole food, razed homes and fired on fleeing civilians.

“It was a sudden attack,” said resident Haruna Bitrus, in an account supported by other locals.

“They began shooting and set fire to our homes. We had to flee to the bush. They killed 20 of our people,” he added.

Many of those who fled the Alagarno attack ran to Chibok. The military said it had deployed heavily to the area to find the 223 girls who have remained in captivity for over one month.

Mallam Umaru Saina, one of the villagers who spoke with correspondents on said, a young woman in the village was missing. She was believed to have been abducted during the attack, since nobody knows the whereabouts of the woman.

“They destroyed everything we had and burnt down our remaining food after stealing what they needed. What is most painful is that they did not spare our kids. They killed kids, women and men.” He said.

Alagarno village is about 30 kilometers from Chibok town where about 275 female students sitting to their

WAEC at the Government Secondary School, were abducted by the insurgents, and about 117 kilometres from Maiduguri, the Borno state capital.

In a similar development, the civilian Joint Task Force intercepted about nine Boko Haram elements caught trying to get into Maiduguri.

Sources close to the JTF said they were handed over to the military authorities.

Major world powers, including the United States, are offering varying levels of assistance with the rescue mission.

Bitrus said despite claims of a military build-up in the area, troops had not responded to the latest attack.

“While the gunmen were fleeing, three of their vehicles broke down and they have stayed behind to fix them. They were there up to this morning” with no response from the military, he said.

Apagu Maidaga of Alagarno village said residents hid in the bush and watched while the extremists set ablaze their homes of thatch-roofed mud huts.

“We saw our village up in flames as we hid in the bush waiting for the dawn; we lost everything,” he told The Associated Press in a telephone call.

The Human Rights Watch (HRW) yesterday called for a panel to probe the source of funding for Boko Haram's activities.

It has submitted a proposal to the United Nations (UN) Security Council and the European Union (EU) on the need to set up an independent panel to find out how the sect's activities are financed.

HRW's Nigeria Researcher Mrs Mausi Segun, at a news conference in Lagos, said an international panel would ensure accountability in such a probe, adding: “The military cannot investigate itself.”

She said “severe” human rights abuses by security agents in the course of fighting insurgency had further aggravated the situation.

“There have been several abuses. In the Northeast, scores of men have disappeared after being arrested. How do you get the support of the people when human rights have been violated? This only continues to fuel their sense of injustice.

“The heavy-handed approach of security agents is so counter-productive and with that, all counter-insurgency attempts are doomed to fail,” she said.

The group also expressed “serious concerns” about sending security forces to secure schools, saying it could increase the possibility of such places being attacked.

“Protection should be community-based. Schools should be de-militarised so as not to increase the likelihood of being targeted. Early warning systems should be developed. Besides, sending troops to protect schools could create a security imbalance,” Segun said.

HRW's European Media Director Andrew Stroehlein called for caution on the part of foreign countries providing technologies that Nigeria does not have access to in the bid to rescue the abducted schools girls.

He said: “Does the involvement of these countries – the US, UK, Israel – give Boko Haram another argument?

There is a concern if these issue of drones goes beyond surveillance drones.

“There were drones used in Yemen and Pakistan. Fighting insurgency with them is not made easier. Imagine a drone strike on a wedding. Besides the crime that it is in itself, it drives recruitment of more terrorists.

“What I’m saying is that it’s a double-edged sword. Its good to have the support. Now they (foreign governments) in Paris are actually discussing the kind of cooperation that should have been years ago.

“We all have been reporting on these problems, but where was the rest of the world? We and other organisations have been saying much the same thing.

“This enormous spotlight that has been put on this particular problem by this latest turn of events in the last few weeks – is there a risk that you will see more foreign (terrorist) fighters coming in?

“Is there a risk that this whole scenario provides them with more resources and more fighters who could see this as an opportunity to conduct jihad in another theatre of operations?

“I think there’s a risk. If we move from surveillance activity of drones to weaponised offensive drones, then we’ll be very worried that we’re going to see the same sort of problems that we have seen in Yemen and Pakistan, which have caused abuses there, and which have really acted as advertising for more recruits.

“If people see injustice like that – the bombing of a wedding for example – if it happens to your friends, to your family, even your countryman or people you feel some affinity or identity with, the injustice of that just drives people to want to fight back; not everybody, but some small percentage of people will want to see justice done by their own means, which then leads to more atrocities in a circle that unfortunately are too common.”