

5 Last week, a student of Federal Polytechnic Nasarawa, Gyang Pam, died in the hospital after two major operations, having been shot in the eye. His parents' initial fear was that he might not be able to see again with the affected eye. But they would have preferred that the student came out of his sick bed with one eye than passing on after spending five days in the hospital.

His elder brother, Geoffrey Chuwang, who was with him in the hospital, said amid tears: "My brother would have survived the gunshot but for the wickedness of the soldiers of the STF." According to his family members, the hapless student was being escorted back to school by three of his friends, when some soldiers on an armoured vehicle of the STF took them as some of the trouble makers and opened fire on them.

Chuwang said: "A bullet from the soldiers' guns hit my brother in the left eye and he fell, but the soldiers prevented us from taking him to the hospital. While he was shot at 11 am on Tuesday morning, they refused to release the boy to us until 11 pm the same day. This is pure wickedness. If we had rushed him to the hospital early enough, my brother would have survived."

The youth leader of Bisichi, Mr. Pam Bot lamented amid sobs: "How can we be subjected to this kind of horror in our land? Our grandparents welcomed these Fulani people when they came, accommodated them and gave them land to live. Today, the same Fulani have become terrorists to the Berom people. What have we done to them? Who will save us from the hand of these terrorists?"

Also lamenting, the federal lawmaker, Barrister Gyang, said: "The same Fulani we hosted are now carrying arms, killing people in their houses. Berom people can no longer go to their farms because they are being haunted by the Fulani. You can't go to farm and you can't sleep in your house. What a hell is this?"

"The role of the special task force (STF) in the crisis leaves much to be desired. All the killings are happening under their watch. I don't know why they are there. I tend to ask myself, is this not the same Nigerain army that went to Liberia and Sierra Leone to rescue the countries from rebels? Why can't they do the same thing in their own country?"

"Are they no longer professional soldiers? Nigerian soldiers had gone out to defend a whole country, but in my constituency, they cannot defend only two local government areas with their presence in Plateau State for years.

"Now look at this scenario: the soldiers are not defending my people, and when the people mobilize themselves to defend their communities, the STF will come and arrest them for defending their communities. When did it become an offence for people to defend themselves?"

"In Borno State, the joint task force works with the civilians and they even have the civilian JTF. But here, youths are being arrested for defending their communities. This is frustrating. Why is the case of Plateau and Middle-Belt different?"

"Now, half of Berom ancestral land has been taken over forcibly by the Fulani. My argument is, I know the Nigeria constitution makes all of us citizens of the country with the right to live anywhere you chose in this country. But as a citizen, you have to respect the rights and customs of those you met wherever you want to settle."

However, the Special Task Force (STF) on Jos crisis, code



● STF  
Commander Major  
General Tagbo Ude  
leading his men to  
restore normalcy in  
Bisichi

# Plateau: Berom, Fulani trade blame as fear of ethnic cleansing heightens

named 'Operation Safe Haven', sees it differently. The federal troops are beating their chest for having done well in keeping the violence in the area low.

Spokesman of the STF, Captain Ikedichi Iweha, said in an interview with *The Nation*:

"Our investigation revealed that the recent violence was provoked with the killing of a Fulani man along Kassa Road by unknown gunmen. It was an ambush attack. The man killed in that attack is a resident of Bisichi.

"After that, two other persons were also attacked and killed in Bisichi village. They were also ambushed by some unknown gunmen. Two Fulanis were on their way to the cattle market in Bukuru but were ambushed by some unknown gunmen. One of them was killed, the second escaped with gunshot wounds.

"The existing suspicion has been that if a Fulani man is the victim of an attack, the Berom is the suspect, and if the victim of an attack is a Berom man, the suspect is automatically Fulani. That was why after the incidents stated above, some gunmen suspected to be Fulani struck and killed four Berom people in Bisichi. Their bodies were recovered by STF. That was how the violence escalated.

"The truth is that both warring factions in Barkin Ladi are armed, but one of them will come out to accuse the other of carrying arms. And it is their possession of arms that

encourages attacks and killings with any slight provocation from the other group. But one thing we cannot deny and will not condone is the case where a Fulani would lead his cattle to graze on a farm. We have witnessed some of those cases, and each time we see that we make sure we arrest such a cattle breeder.

"These troubles started within just one week of the resumption of the new commander, Major General Tagbo Ude. But the Commander did not give them a chance. He moved us out to the scene of trouble and that was what saved the situation. It would have been worse without his personal intervention.

"Another truth is that both the Fulani and the Berom are aggressors. Neither of them can claim to be a saint in these killings. When you meet the Berom, they will tell you a juicy story to show that they are innocent. The same story when you meet the Fulani people. But we know that all of them are attackers."

With that background knowledge of the situation in Barkin Ladi, the commander took his time to talk to leaders of Berom and Fulani. He preached to their youths on peaceful co-existence. As a matter of fact, the Commander was addressing youths in Bisichi village when some gunmen came to attack the village. The soldiers repelled the attack immediately, with the Commander putting up his bullet-proof vest and his headgear because guns were booming. Iweha said: "The Commander, through some well coordinated intelligence network, foiled several planned attacks in some other villages while we were still trying to address the problems in Bisichi. What happened was that the problem in Bisichi actually had a spiral effect on other villages in the local government as well as in neighboring Riyom Local Government.

"We were very proactive in preventing the planned attack. It would have been the whole of Barkin Ladi on fire, but

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