

Two policemen killed as herdsmen step up attacks

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•Ortom rejects Fed Govt's cattle colony plan

•Governor meets Buhari

Despite killing no fewer than 71 persons in Benue State and provoking a big outrage, herdsmen have continued their bloody campaign.

Two mobile policemen drafted to the trouble spot were reported to have been killed yesterday.

Benue State Governor Samuel Ortom alleged that the herdsmen launched attacks from the neighbouring Nasarawa State —a claim Governor Tanko Al-Makura rejected.

Ortom yesterday rejected the Federal Government's plan to establish colonies for cattle herders.

According to him, the only option to solve the farmers / herdsmen clashes is the establishment of ranches as it is being done globally.

Ortom spoke with State House correspondents after a closed-door meeting with President Muhammadu Buhari that lasted for about two hours at the Presidential Villa, Abuja.

The leadership of the Miyetti Allah Kautal Hore, he said, should also be arrested and prosecuted for alleged genocide. The organisation insists the killings, which have caused over 70 deaths, were not done by herdsmen.

The governor explained that he had been briefing President Buhari on the activities of the herdsmen right from when they started their onslaught on the state's people.

He also disclosed that the militia opposing the state's anti-open grazing law, operates from Tonga in Awe Local Government Area of Nassarawa State.

Due to the sophistication of the herdsmen's weapons, Ortom said, two Mobile policemen drafted to maintain peace were killed on Monday.

The governor said: "I am waiting to be briefed about what 'colonies' means; I don't understand it and until I understand it...but like I keep saying, for us, the way forward is ranching and uptill this time, I am talking to you, the way forward is ranching because it's global best practice.

"And it is the practice in other parts of the world – on African soil in Swaziland, South Africa, Kenya, Tanzania, Mozambique, almost all African countries that rear cattle; they

ranch, so why can't we do the same thing here. For the colony thing, I don't know what colony is."

On how many ranches his administration has created, Ortom said: "It's not for me to create ranches, I know that as a farmer I have one in my farm and there are several other people who are free. The permits are available for people who want to ranch their cattle to access land and begin to ranch.

"So it is free for everybody and that is the right way to go. And since we started the implementation, there has been relative peace amongst farmers and herdsmen. They were doing well until this militia coming from this Miyetti Allah Kautal Hore came and attacked us.

"And they are known; we know where they are. As I talk to you, they are in Tongua in Awe Local Government (Nassarawa); that is where these people are camped and coming to attack people."

On whether he had been briefing the President, he said: "I had earlier briefed Mr. President when this incident took place on the 1st of January. After staying back on the ground to do the needful to ensure that we restored normalcy I said it was important for me to come personally and brief him and that has been done.

"Already, because of the communications we have been having when this incidents started, actions have been taken as directed by him. The movement of the DIG (Deputy Inspector General) of Police, the movement of the IG (Inspector General) now to relocate to Benue State to ensure that this challenge is surmounted was at the instance of Mr. President.

"Of course, additional personnel of DSS (Department of State Services) and Police have been deployed and even the Army. We have additional personnel on ground now. We have ... given them the logistics support to ensure that our people are protected.

“I had to brief him; he is also doing further investigation to know the next line of action. I believe that my request that the leadership of Miyetti Allah Kautal Hore, who has earlier threatened and I accused them directly; since June last year I have been writing to the leadership of security agencies, that these people are a threat to our collective interest and they must be dealt with. They must be arrested and prosecuted because we cannot allow impunity to continue to thrive.

“And, of course, threat and no action has resulted in this killing and I think that Mr. President will also do the needful to ensure something is done.”

On the allegations that he hired mercenaries from Republic of Ghana to fight the herdsmen, Ortom said: “I am not aware of this and I don’t even know about that one. I am hearing it for the first time. If someone has done that, it must be this Miyetti Allah Kautal Hore, that have done it.”

Asked if he was blocked from seeing the President, Ortom said: “I have never accused anyone of blocking me from seeing Mr. President. I am seeing Mr. President. I told him when this incident occurred I spoke to Mr. President on phone and followed it up.

“I know what it entails being a President. Even as governor, most times, I am not with my phone; people cannot access me the way it used to be, talk less of a President.

“I didn’t say that and I have not said it. The truth is that I have access to Mr. President anytime I want. I speak to him on phone and I see him personally. I requested to speak to him on phone that day because I couldn’t come to Abuja and he gave me the opportunity and today I am here and I have seen him.”

On the push for military operations in Benue State, the governor said: “Anything that can stop the killings of my people I will go for it; I support it. Any policy or any directive, anything that will help stop the killing of these innocent people who are not armed because this can not continue.