



About Us

News

Politics

Columnists

Business

Editorial

Sports

Health

Entertainment

Magazine

Education

Online Special

Reader's Account

MENU

Gunmen kill two priests, 14 worshippers at mass

Posted By: [Uja Emmanuel](#) On: April 25, 2018 In: [Featured](#), [News](#), [News Update](#)

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*Priests and sympathisers in front of St. Theresa's hospital mortuary, yesterday

PHOTO: UJA EMMAUEL

The late Fr. Joseph Gou

The late Fr. Peter Iyemba



Youths protest in Makurdi

Buhari: we'll hunt down killers

Akume condemns killings

it was another bloody day in Benue State yesterday.

Gunmen, suspected to be herdsmen, killed two Catholic priests and 14 others in two attacks.

In the first attack, they invaded St Ignatius Quasi Parish, Ukpor Mbalon, Gwer Local Government Area, at dawn during a mass, shooting dead the priests and 11 parishioners.

They killed three other people later.

Police Commissioner Fatai Owoseni said the gunmen “attacked worshippers around 5 a.m. during morning Mass”. “Other victims were killed during a burial ceremony later in the day.”

He described the attacks as “unfortunate” and vowed to fish out the perpetrators and bring them to justice.

Owoseni said that preliminary investigation revealed that the herdsmen had stayed around the area for sometime before carrying out the attacks. The commissioner said more policemen had been deployed in the area to forestall further attacks.

The attackers sacked the village, setting ablaze 35 houses.

The Catholic Diocese of Makurdi gave the names of its slain priests as Rev. Fathers Joseph Gor and Felix Tyolaha of St Ignatius Quasi Parish, Ukpor.

A statement by its Director of Communications, Rev. Fr. Moses Iorapuu, said that the attacks were perpetrated by herdsmen who stormed Mbalom and killed the two priests during the morning mass.

The diocese expressed regrets at what it described as the nonchalant attitude of the security agencies in containing the killings.

It said the herdsmen burnt down houses, destroyed crops and killed people.

The church urged the authorities to stop the killings in the Benue valley.

Iorapuu said the Diocese had been providing food and relief materials to Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) since the beginning of the violence in the state and wondered why it could be a target of attacks.

“The attacks on the priests are attacks on everything that we ever stood for and believed in,” he added.

Rev. Fr. Mbachie and Igyor who were at the Benue State Police Command headquarters after conveying the priests’ bodies to the mortuary, said the attackers escaped unchallenged and there was no security man to confront them. Worshippers fled the scene for their dear lives.

It was learnt that when youths in Makurdi, the state capital, saw the body of one of the slain priests being brought to St Theresa’s Hospital Mortuary without its head, they got angry and took to the streets in protest.

The protest forced traders to shut down the popular Wurukum market. Banks and other business premises were hurriedly shut. Parents withdrew their children from schools.

The popular Katsina Ala Street, Igyor Chia Ayu Road and Makurdi – Gboko was deserted as residents trekked many kilometres to their destinations.

Fr. Iyorapuu wondered why despite the heavy presence of the Police, the Navy, Army and Air Force in Makurdi and Benue State, the killings had continued unabated since the beginning of the year.

Governor Samuel Ortom has cut short his vacation in China. He is on his way back home.

There were killings also last week in Logo, Guma, Makurdi and Naka by suspected Fulani militia.

Chief Press Secretary to the Governor Terver Akase said the governor would return to Makurdi “any moment from now because of the security challenge.

Former Governor George Akume condemned the killings. In a statement, the senator said: “Today, April 24, 2018, I received the tragic news of the brutal killing of two Reverend Fathers, Joseph Gor and Felix Tyolaha, VC, Mr. John Ibor – Catechist and over 17 lay faithful of St. Ignatius Quasi Parish, Ukpo, Mbalom in Gwer Local Government Area of Benue State. The victims were in the Church for the morning mass when they were attacked and killed by rampaging herdsmen.

“This treacherous and inhuman action is unprecedented, unprovoked and highly condemnable in any civilised society. However, we seek solace in the fact that they died in the Lord and shall live with the Lord. May their blood usher in a new era of peace, love, tranquillity and progress in Benue State.

“On behalf of my family and the good people of the Benue North-West Senatorial District, I wish to express my sincere condolences to the Bishop of the Catholic Diocese of Makurdi and families of the victims of the latest acts of banditry and brazen criminality in our society. I also sympathize with those who have suffered varying degrees of injury as a result of the mayhem and pray for their quick recovery.

“I also use this opportunity to call on Federal Government to urgently help bring a decisive end to the cycle of violence, destruction and killings in Benue State by ensuring that the perpetrators are apprehended and brought to justice.

“Let me urge our people to be vigilant and report any suspicious activities to constituted authorities, be law abiding and avoid taking the law into their hands. Security is our collective responsibility and the people are hereby called upon to support the

government and work hand in hand with the security agencies to make it an attainable reality.

“May the souls of the faithful departed through the Mercy God rest in peace.”

Buhari: we'll hunt down killers

President Muhammadu Buhari yesterday described as “vile and satanic” the killing of worshippers and two priests at a Catholic church in Ukpor-Mbalom community in Gwer East Local Government Area of Benue State.

In a statement by his Special Adviser on Media and Publicity Femi Adesina, the President said: “I extend my sincere condolences to the government and people of Benue State, the Mbalom community, and especially the Bishop, priests and members of the St Ignatius’ Catholic Church, whose premises was the unfortunate venue of the heinous killings by gunmen.

“This latest assault on innocent persons is particularly despicable. Violating a place of worship, killing priests and worshippers is not only vile, evil and satanic, it is clearly calculated to stoke up religious conflict and plunge our communities into endless bloodletting,” the President said.

Stressing that the country will not bow to the machinations of evildoers, President Buhari vowed that the assailants would be hunted down and made to pay for the sacrilege committed.



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