

Soldiers kill wife of Benue militia chief, 11 others

Posted By: [Uja Emmanuel, Makurdi and agency report](#) On: October 21, 2018 In: [News, News Update](#)

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•Military resettles 145, 000 IDPs in three states

Soldiers keeping the peace in Benue, Taraba and Nassarawa States have killed the wife of wanted Benue State militia chief, Terwase Akwaza (Gana), and 11 of his men during assaults on the group's hideouts, the authorities said yesterday.

The Commander, Operation Whirl Stroke (OPWS), Major-General Adeyemi Yekini told reporters in Makurdi, Benue State, yesterday that the assaults took place in Sai, Katsina-

Ala Local Government Area of Benue State.

He gave the name of Gana's wife that was killed as Queen.

Yekini said that following the heavy casualties suffered by the militia group at Sai, it went on a revenge mission last Thursday, attacking a mobile police station in Zaki-Biam.

"The policemen on ground gave stiff resistance to the attackers while OPWS troops from four nearby locations as well as the 72 Battalion troops from Katsina-Ala were immediately mobilised to the location, thereby forcing the militia men to disperse into surrounding bushes," the commander said.

He said some troops that have just been deployed to Zaki Biam metropolis to reassure the local populace of their safety also conducted a fighting patrol to Akena, Ayati and Sai in the hope to locate a soldier who was missing during the Sai attack.

"Unfortunately, we couldn't locate the missing soldier as the camp was empty. Our troops destroyed the camp before returning back to base around 1800 hours yesterday (Friday). We will continue to search for Gana until he and his men are brought to justice."

He also announced that the military operation had facilitated the return of 145,000 Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) to their homes in the three states: Benue, Taraba and Nasarawa.

He said more IDPs would return home in the weeks ahead, saying "some kinetic activities of the OPWS are beginning to yield fruitful results as community leaders are being engaged in resolving conflicts within their communities."

Forty-five assault weapons, 1,285 rounds of ammunition and 24 AK47 magazines were recovered from bandits, including armed herdsmen by the soldiers, he said.