

# NEW YEAR TRAGEDY

## How gunmen invaded community, sent six into untimely grave

In spite of its proximity to Jos, the Plateau State capital, residents of Kwata-Zawan community of Jos South local government came under gunmen attack a day after the new year. YUSUFU AMINU-IDEGU, report the feelings of the bereaved and the mood of the community.

**I**t is an annual ritual in the world over that within the last week of any year, people pray to see the new year. Even those who pretend to be too busy to pray from January till December will create time to pray within the last minutes of the outgoing year; everybody wants to cross over to another new year. And in most cases, those who often make it to the new year have reasons to celebrate the cross over as another life accomplishment. Hence, it's normal for citizens to spend days celebrating. It's a period where people eat the best food they can afford and spend money to make themselves happy. In such days, relaxation spots are often the last place of visit where friends and families will relax and take drinks they may wish to celebrate the moment with.

This was exactly the blissful scenario at a local relaxation spot in Kwata-Zawan on the evening of January 2, 2019 when some of unknown gunmen with unknown mission stormed the area and sprayed innocent people with bullets and subsequently turned the convivial mood in the community to a sorrowful moment. The gunmen on arrival simply opened fire on people, killing four of them instantly. Many fled on hearing the first sound of gunshots to escape the attack. They ran as fast as their legs could carry them. Some simply hid behind rocks to survive the bullets.

The gunmen were not satisfied that they could kill only four on the spot. So, as they were retreating, they gunned down two more people who were unlucky to cross their way. One of the two was a 20-year-old student of University of Jos, Abraham Mangut Matyek, who was just returning home from a football field after training. The second victim was a former councillor, Hon. Sunday Gyang.

When Daloyop Solomon, a civil society crusader, raised the alarm on the social media at about 7:30pm of the same day that an attack was being carried out in Kwata-Zawan, not many took him seriously. Many waved off his alarm thinking it was one of the false alarms that have been causing tension in the state. But few hours later, what was thought to be a false alarm turned to reality. The gunmen have done it again! They killed six innocent citi-



• Hon. Gyang



• Abraham

zens and disappeared into thin air as usual. The gunmen left many family members, friends and parents gnashing their teeth in grief.

However, while the bereaved families were trying to console themselves and manage the tragedy that befell them, the police released a statement that saddened them. According to a statement issued by the Police Public Relations Officer, DSP Terna Tyopev, "On the 02/01/2019 at about 1930hrs, the Plateau State Police Command, Jos, received a distress call to the effect that unknown cult groups armed with cutlasses, axe and guns attacked themselves near a Night Club at Kwata Zawan in Jos South Local Government Area of Plateau State.

"As a result of the attack, four persons lost their lives. The corpses of the victims have been deposited at the Plateau Specialist Hospital Mortuary for autopsy. Meanwhile, the Commissioner of Police, Plateau State Command CP Austin Agbonlahor, has directed the immediate commencement of investigation in to the crime. This statement from the police infuriated the affected fami-

lies. One of them, Ibrahim Makut, said: "Our pain mostly is the fact that the police chose to lie to the whole world on how our people were killed, a situation where gunmen stormed the community and just opened fire on whoever they saw; the police that was not there when the killings took place went on air telling the whole world it was a clash between cult groups. Describing some one who died in such attack as cultists is most annoying and provocative.

"I will not forgive the police for calling my innocent son a cultist; even the Head of Department of Physical Health Education of University of Jos, who led the students to pay us a condolence visit, said Abraham had no trace of cult in all his life in the school campus and hostel, but police as a government institution thought otherwise; it is unacceptable to us".

The second victim, Hon. Sunday Gyang, according to his family, was no where near the scene of attack; he was just at home having a good time with his family when tragedy visited him. His 20-year-old son, Mang Sunday said: "We were at home chatting and discussing the new year while waiting for dinner to be served. Then, we heard series of gunshots and there was pandemonium outside. We heard people shouting and wailing. At first, my father wanted to go out to check what was going on, but my mom stopped him. She (mom) said none of us children should go out. Later, I went into my room and after a while, I heard a gunshot very close; that was when they shot dad. I never knew my father went out, they shot him right in front of our house".

Indeed, the former councillor refused to heed his

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• Views of the attacked spot...under lock

wife's warning and went out. His coming out coincided with the time the gunmen were retreating after the attack; they sighted him and aimed at him on his chest as the bullet pierced through his heart. He died instantly and was confirmed dead later in the hospital. His first son, Mang, said: "My father never ate the dinner he was waiting for and no member of the family did. My mother is now a widow and we are now orphans."

The four victims that were killed at the relaxation center were given mass burial immediately. One of them, who was a native of Southern Kaduna village, was moved home for burial by his parents. The drinking joint was under lock when The Nation visited the scene at the weekend. The entire community itself is in a mourning mood and an uneasy calm descended on the place. It was obvious residents were yet to recover from the shock of the new year attack.

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