

58 killed in Niger, Benue, Plateau states

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from house to house, forcibly dragging the occupants, including a pregnant woman, out of their homes.

Irrked by the development, youths of the community and Suleja mobilised and blocked the Kaduna-Abuja Expressway before setting the police outpost ablaze.

Police spokesman Wasiu Abiodun, who confirmed the incident, called for calm. He said efforts were being made to rescue the abductees. He however expressed dismay over the burning of the Gauraka Police outpost.

Abiodun said: "At about 0635hrs of the same date, some miscreants blocked both sides of Abuja-Kaduna Expressway, protesting the recent cases of kidnapping in the community. The miscreants later extended the protest to Gauraka Police outpost vandalised and set it ablaze."

A source also told The Nation that in Munya council area, the bandits killed 13 residents and injured 26 others. Twelve others were killed in different attacks in Guni and Kuchi communities in Mariga council area. Indigenes of the villages

were said to have sought refuge in neighboring communities.

According to the source, vigilance groups in Munya exchanged fire with the bandits for over two hours before they retreated to the forest.

Commissioner for Local Government and Chieftaincy Affairs, Abdulmalik Daji, confirmed the incidents. He added that those injured were receiving treatment in Kontagora.

In Benue State, where Governor Samuel Ortom banned vigilance groups operating illegally, a prominent indigene said herders killed 13 persons in Mbayongo District, Katsina-Ala council area. Council Chairman Alfred Atera claimed that more than 100 died in attacks in two months.

Mbayongo is the country home of the late bandit, Terwase Akwaza (a.k.a Gana). Akwaza was killed when he allegedly attempted to escape after arrest.

A prominent member of the community, Edward Kwaghondo, said the attacks at the weekend left 13 dead, many injured, and houses burnt.

"They came on Saturday and Sunday nights, They killed 13 persons and sacked the whole

community," Kwaghondo claimed.

Council chairman Atera said 100 persons had in the past two months, been killed by herdsmen in Yooyo, Utange, Mbatyula/Mberek, and Mbayongo wards.

He said: "Close to a hundred people have been killed by the herdsmen if not more at different places.

"I told the military, but these people have developed a strategy.

"These people (herders) are not attacking one place. If they attack Kwaghaondo village, for instance, they quickly move to another place. So, before the military could go there, they had moved to another place."

But, the Commander of Operations Whirl Stroke, a military outfit in charge of Benue, Nasarawa and Taraba states (OPWS), Brig. - Gen. Clement Afere, dismissed the claims..

Afere told *The Nation* on telephone that there was no way such a number of people would have been killed without evidence.

"Let them bring picture evidence," he said.

Ortom yesterday directed that anyone seen wearing the uniforms of banned illegal vig-

ilante groups should be arrested and prosecuted.

Twenty of the deaths in Plateau State were recorded in Kwi in Riyom local government, Kadarko in Wase local government and Dong in Jos local government.

Seven of them were killed in Dong, six in Kadarko and seven in Kwi.

Many others injured were said to have been injured by the attackers believed to be herds-men

Police spokesman, Gabriel Ubah, who confirmed the killings, said the assailants had fled into the bush by the time security agents arrived at the scene.

Governor Simon Lalong urged security agencies to bring the perpetrators to justice.

Commissioner for Information and Communication, Dan Manjang, in a statement, described the killings as barbaric and callous.

Management Committee Chairman, Jos North Local Government Area, Alhaji Shehu Usman, urged inhabitants of the area not to take the laws into their hands.

He said security agencies were doing everything to bring the perpetrators to book.