

Tears, sorrow as herdsmen kill 46 in attacks on Benue, Nasarawa communities

- 20 seriously injured, many others missing
- Survivor: I ran for dear life as my wife, son, father fell to invaders' bullets

■ From Uja **EMMANUEL**, Makurdi and Linus **OOTA**, Lafia

NO fewer than 46 people have been killed in separate attacks by herdsmen on communities in Benue and Nasarawa states.

While about 36 people were shot dead and their houses were set ablaze in a blistering early morning attack in Gbeji, a community in Ukum Local Government Area of Benue State early Wednesday, at least 10 people including women and children were reckoned to have died from a similar attack on farmers in Gidan Sule, Kardoroko area of Keana Local Government Area of Nasarawa State on October 8.

Indeed October 8 and 9, 2022 will remain indelible in the minds of farmers in Gidan Sule, being the days some herdsmen swooped on them, killing no fewer than 10 people and forcing the entire inhabitants of the community to take refuge elsewhere after their homes were turned into rubble.

A few years ago, the AK47 wielding invaders had left terrible marks in the same area as similar attacks left many farmers dead.

In the latest outing on Gidan Sule, which was unexpected as the community had witnessed relative peace since Governor Abdullahi Sule assumed office, the invaders dealt a merciless blow on the host community.

Our correspondent, who went round the community with security agents and the leadership of Tiv Development Association (TIDA) led by its president, Comrade Peter Ahemba, discovered that the villagers deserted their homes with the community turning the community into a ghost town while domestic animals were seen roaming aimlessly.

Recounting their ordeal at the hands of the suspected militia, a resident of the community, Mr Amulet Agber, said: "They have finished me completely. They killed my father, wife and only child. I am hopeless and I don't know where to start from."

"We did not have any problem with herdsmen in Gidan Sule in recent times. They just woke up and turned the heat on us without any form of disagreement."

He added: "It was around 4pm on that fateful day and we had just returned from the farm very tired. Suddenly we started hearing gunshots all over the village."

"When the sound of the gunshots was becoming louder and we were about to run for our lives, they shot at my wife and child. Then another bullet hit my father and they died on the spot. I had to run for my life because bullets kept coming from all angles. I survived only because God said it was not yet time for me to die."

"They wiped out nearly all my family members. They were fully armed. I saw them with my two eyes. The only thing they did not do this time around was burning down houses. But they made sure that they shot at any Tiv farmer/villager they saw."

"As I talk to you, everybody has deserted this community which has a large population of Tiv farmers."

Another surviving victim, Mr Donald Iorshie, said what happened on that fateful day was regrettable. The attacks, he said, left close to 20 people with serious injuries while many others were still missing and unaccounted for.

Iorshie said: "It was a sad day for us in Gidan Sule. The herdsmen suddenly attacked us without any form of disagreement, killed 10 people and shot so many who are now in the hospital."

Almost every surviving member of Gidan Sule community has fled their homes for fear of



• Displaced persons



• Senator Suswam, during the on spot assessment of the victims of the attack



• Victims squat on the floor to receive treatment

possible attacks by killer herdsmen."

Recalling the incident, he said: "There was confusion everywhere as my brother was trying to see how his family could escape. In the process of trying to run away, they shot and killed him."

Speaking in an interview with our correspondent, one of the locals, Mr. Iorzuu Tyodugh, who escaped narrowly from the attack, lamented that his cassava and guinea farms, both measuring over five hectares, had been destroyed by the herdsmen.

"The herdsmen now graze freely on our farm crops at both day and night. They have mobilised their herds from within and outside Keana Local Government."

"Our hope of going back eventually to harvest our crops, which is our only means of survival has been dashed. Even if we return home eventually, we will have nothing to feed our families and take care of other needs," he said.

Among the deceased victims were Uwuhu Tarza, Madam Samuel Aor, Philomina, Boyi Udekor, Hemen Samuel, Suega Oter as well as the other dead bodies yet to be identified.

Over 1,000 persons have been displaced and are taking refuge at Kadarko, Giza towns and other places within Keana LGA.

Our correspondent gathered that there is

high tension in the area as the entire population in Gidan Sule in Kardoroko have been displaced and are taking refuge in Kardoroko main town under the rain.

Only recently some herdsmen attacked some Tiv communities in Gidan Antsar of Kwaraa electoral ward of Keana LGA, killing four Tiv farmers. There was also another attack on Tiv farmers in Doka Ward of Doma LGA all in Kardoroko axis.

displacing the entire population of the two electoral wards who are now taking refuge in Kardoroko and Giza.

It was gathered that the herdsmen destroyed farm crops, preventing the farmers from accessing their farms and even their homes and forcing them to flee for dear lives.

President of TIDA, Comrade Peter Ahemba, has since been holding series of meetings with Fulani leaders as well as an emergency security council meeting with the executive chairman of Keana LGA, pleading with the warring groups not to take the law into their hands.

The Tiv leader who confirm the development to our correspondent and appealed to the Tiv farmers to remain calm as he had already reported the matter to the Executive Governor of Nasarawa State, Engr Abdullahi Sule, and he was taking actions towards restoring peace in the area.

He appreciated Governor Sule for all his efforts to ensure that peace returns to Nasarawa State and the farmers are back to their farms and homes.

Comrade Peter Ahemba appealed to government to hasten efforts by deploying security to the affected areas to calm the tension that was brewing. He also appealed to the state government to provide relief materials to the IDPs who are in pains and hunger under the rain pending when normalcy would return to the area.

Following the massacre at Gbeji, Governor Samuel Ortom, the Senator representing Benue North-East Senatorial District, Dr Gabriel Suswam, the Speaker, Benue State House of Assembly and PDP gubernatorial candidate, Engr Titus Uba; House of Representatives member for Ukum/Logo/Katsina-Ala Federal Constituency, Dr Richard Gbande, among others, yesterday visited the community. Addressing the families of the victims and other survivors during the visit, Governor Ortom who was represented by the Secretary to the

State Government, Professor Anthony Ijohor, SAN, expressed sadness over the unfortunate incident.

He reiterated the stand of the Benue State Government that since the Federal Government has failed to provide security for the people, a licence should be approved for the state government to procure sophisticated weapons for the Community Volunteer Guards to protect the people.

The Governor insisted that the limited conventional security agencies were overstretched and were unable to provide adequate protection for the people of the state.

"We are standing on our request for the Federal Government to give us a license for our Volunteer Guards to bear AK-47 and other sophisticated weapons. The security agencies have been overstretched, that being the case, our people have to defend themselves," he said.

Governor Ortom urged young people to stand firm and protect their lands, stating that self help is the only option left since the present administration at the centre has shown that it is incapable of providing security for the people.

He sympathized with those who lost loved ones in the attack on Gbeji and encouraged them not to lose hope no matter the circumstances, saying the state government would provide palliatives to offer succour to the affected persons.

Senator Suswam in his remarks berated the Federal Government for what he described as its irresponsibility and failure to provide security for citizens.

According to him, "the Federal Government has failed woefully in the protection of lives and property". He lamented that rising insecurity had exposed the country's nakedness.

"So far 36 bodies have been recovered from this dastardly attack by herdsmen. This is totally unacceptable by all standards. It is a clear indication that the Federal Government has failed in protection of lives and property of the people that they swore to protect."

"What this means in effect is that power has been transferred to non-state actors. They are totally in charge now and come to kill people at will and go freely, and no person has ever been arrested."

While commending the bravery of security operatives, Senator Suswam maintained that they had been overstretched, noting that among those killed were two policemen who he noted were grossly inadequate and could not cope with the firepower of the terrorists.

In his remarks, the Speaker, Benue State House of Assembly and PDP governorship candidate, Engr Uba, expressed sadness over the unprovoked killings he said had gone on for too long without the Federal Government arresting the situation.

The Speaker insisted that since the Federal Government was not ready to provide security to stop the Benue killings, the authorities should grant licence to the State Government to procure firearms for Volunteer Guards to complement conventional agencies in tackling insecurity in the state.

Speaker Uba also advocated the creation of state police to enable each state of the federation to deal with rising security challenges.