

# Blood, tears in Zamfara, Kaduna

## IGP deploys armed policemen

It appears that the more efforts the Federal Government puts into solving insecurity problems in the North, the more intractable they become, going by the resurgence of killings in some communities in the zone – with telling effects on trade and family life, writes MUHAMMED SABIU (with Agency Reports)

**T**HE killing of over 30 persons in Kizara village of Tsafe Local Government Area of Zamfara State on Tuesday has once again brought to the fore the seeming intractability of the security problems in the North generally, and has somehow cast a cloud of uncertainty on the effectiveness of the Federal Government's efforts to end the embarrassing development.

Investigations revealed that the recent carnage in Tsafe particularly could be attributed to intense rivalry between members of some vigilance groups and hoodlums in those communities a war zone.

The recent attacks in Tsafe bear the imprint of the same bandits that attacked Dansadai in Maru, Zurmi and Birnin Magaji Local Government areas respectively.

Some of the hoodlums have been found to be were Nigeriens and Beninoise, who carried out the attacks with the full support of their Nigerian counterparts. The heavy presence of security operatives in Dansadai may have been the reason the hoodlums shifted base to Tsafe.

The Commissioner of Police in Zamfara, Mr Usman Gwary, however, said no arrests had been made. He urged the general public to provide the police with useful information that could lead to the arrest and subsequent prosecution of the culprits.

Already, residents of the affected villages have fled their homes and are taking refuge in Magami and Wanke villages of Gusau Local Government area of the state. The state's Deputy Governor, Malam Ibrahim Wakkala, has paid an unscheduled visit to the 2,200 refugees that have taken refuge in Magami.

The development has also attracted the attention of the Inspector-General of Police, Alhaji Muhammad Abubakar, who has not only visited the area but has ordered the deployment of armed policemen in the area.

Accompanied by the Minister of State for Works, Alhaji Bashir Yuguda, the IGP said they visited the village on the orders of President Goodluck Jonathan, to sympathise with the people over the incident as well as do an on-the-spot assessment of the damage done by the unknown gunmen.

He assured members of the community that the policemen would remain permanently in the area.

"We will join hands with the military and state security to ensure that we bring the perpetrators to book," he said.

Also speaking, the Minister of State for Works, Alhaji Bashir Yuguda appealed to the people to return to their homes as adequate security had now been provided. He urged members of the community to be security-conscious, and to report any suspicious movement to the nearest security operative.

The Executive Secretary of the Zamfara Emergency Management Agency (ZEMA), Alhaji Atiku Maradun, said apart from treating the wounded, displaced persons had been provided with mattresses, blankets and food items.

The delegation was received by the Emir of Tsafe, Alhaji Habibu Yandoto, who

Incessant deadly attacks on Fulani settlements and villages in northern Nigeria by armed bandits – made up partly of disgruntled Fulani who themselves have lost cattle – are threatening herds and upping tensions in the zone.

According to the Integrated Regional Information Network (an agency of the United Nations in charge of coordination of humanitarian affairs), gangs of heavily armed bandits prowl the vast Dajin Rugu forest which spans several hundred square kilometres across Zamfara, Katsina, Kaduna and Niger states, according to



Photo: IRIN

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Fulani leaders.

In February 2012 alone, over 23,000 Fulani herders poured into Cameroon from Nigeria's northeastern state of Taraba, following deadly clashes with farming communities, according to the Miyetti Allah Cattle Breeders Association of Nigeria (MACBAN), an umbrella association of Fulani herders. The gangs steal herds, loot and burn homes, and assault women in the attacks, according to Fulani leaders.

Many of the armed bandits are Fulanis who have joined gangs involved in cross-border armed robbery and cattle-rustling in Nigeria, Niger, Chad, Cameroon, Senegal and Mali.

"Twenty years of conflict has bred criminals among the Fulani who have lost their cattle. All they know is herding, and without cattle, life is devoid of meaning," said Saleh Bayeri, national secretary of MACBAN. "So they turn to highway robbery and raiding the herds of their kinsmen whom they begrudge for not coming to their aid in their predicament."

### "Ugly trend"

Thousands of herders in Kaduna State have fled their homes since 8 June 2013 following raids by cattle rustlers over May and June that killed at least 16 people, according to officials and local vigilantes. On 13 June armed bandits launched a pre-dawn raid on Kwasa-Kwasa village in Birnin Gwari District of Kaduna State, killing five people, including two soldiers and three local vigilantes guarding the village against possible attacks, Adamu Sarkin-Noma, head of a vigilante group in the village, told IRIN.

"This ugly trend is compounding the dilemma of the Fulani herders who are caught in a vicious cycle of conflict, with farmers over-grazing land that has forced thousands of nomads to flee into neighbouring Cameroon, along with their cattle," Bayeri said.

The level of violence – both between these gangs and between Fulani nomads and farmers – has been stepped up over recent years as guns proliferate.

### Vigilante gangs

Villagers in the affected areas, particularly Zamfara and

Kaduna states, have formed vigilante gangs to combat the bandits. Kwara runs a vigilante outfit that hunts down bandits across the north alongside the police. "Looking at the sophisticated guns the Fulani bandits are using in their operations it is clear they have sponsors and some of them are among the elite in society, including MACBAN," he told IRIN.

According to Kwara, much of the cattle rustling is controlled and funded by a cartel including chiefs, politicians and lawyers who can provide legal aid to the bandits in court when arrested.

Bayeri agrees with Kwara. "It is a fact that in some areas Fulani leaders are complicit. This is why we want to be involved in the government effort at combating this menace by exposing them."

Kwara also accused police of supplying weapons to the bandits in return for money. "On many occasions armed robbers we arrested mentioned the names of their arms suppliers, including policemen who we reported to the police authorities."

But some of the vigilante groups have also been accused of carrying out extra-judicial killings of suspected bandits, which in turn, lead to reprisal killings.

### Call for joint military, police unit

More coordinated efforts by the local authorities and security forces are needed to try to temper the violence, said Kaduna State Information Commissioner Saidu Adamu. "A military battalion is grossly inadequate to patrol the vast forest. We are in touch with Zamfara, Katsina and Niger state governments to forge a common front in dealing with this security threat," he told IRIN.

Shehu Hammayidi, a community leader from Unguwar Tsamiya, a village in Faskari District, Katsina State, urged the Nigerian government to establish a special joint military and police unit on cattle rustling as an effective approach to quelling the violence.

But any efforts that do not involve MACBAN will not work, warned Bayeri, saying that only it can mobilize community surveillance to track bandits on the scale needed.

"These criminals are a transnational syndicate of renegade Fulani nomads who know the forest very well, and no amount of military deployment can check their activities without the involvement of MACBAN," he said.

MACBAN knows who some of the criminals are and is willing to expose them, he said, but has been rebuffed by local authorities whom, he says, mistakenly blame all of MACBAN for being complicit in the violence.

It is obvious that to effectively end the insecurity problem in the North, the Federal Government needs to do more than bombarding the area with combat-ready armed security forces and focus more on the infiltration of the area with covert intelligence officers who will be able to nip much of the attacks in the bud.