

35 slaughtered in Taraba

'Foreign fighters may be aiding Fulani herdsmen'

How to end herdsmen/farmers' clashes —Northern States govs

FROM CELESTINE IHEJRIKA,
JOHNSON BABAJIDE-AND
ADELOWO OLADIPO

AT least 35 persons were reportedly killed yesterday with properties worth millions of naira burnt in an attack between Tivs and Fulanis at Takum Local Government Area of Taraba State.

The affected communities include: Ikkyo, Catholic Church Agwaza, Kokonbo, Azer, Lijam, Akesa, Tyow Doshima, Tse Saka and Kwaghlando districts respectively.

According to a resident in the area, Elder. Peter Kaaov, who spoke to Nigerian Tribune at Chanchanji, armed men identified to be Fulani herdsmen, numbering over 70, invaded eight communities/villages and other surrounding areas at about 2p.m. and engaged in shooting and burning of houses.

Kaaov, who said he fled with his newly wedded wife to Takum town, further told *Nigerian Tribune* that over 35 persons were killed by the gun men in different villages, while others sustained various degrees of injuries.

He further revealed that the gunmen were identified to be Fulani herdsmen that came from Benue State as a result of the crisis between the Tivs and Fulanis in that state.

According to him, "the gunmen fled the trouble zone in Benue and entered our villages on a revenge mission and ordered the Tivs to leave Takum and go back to Benue State since they (Tivs) sacked them from Benue State," he said.

When contacted, the Divisional Police Officer (DPO) in charge of Takum, DSP Aghogho Akpovwovwo, told *Nigerian Tribune* that he was not in a position to speak to the media, adding that only the Commissioner of Police or the Police Public Relations Officer (PPRO) in the state were in the position to speak to the press on the incident.

Following the ugly incident, the acting governor of Taraba State, Alhaji Garba Umar, yesterday donated relief materials to over 5,000 Internally Displaced Persons taking refuge in different locations in Takum.

When the *Nigerian Tribune* visited the Internally Displaced Persons currently camping at Chanchanji and Kashimbila in Takum Local Government Area,

they were being guided by heavily armed security personnel, who keep 24 hours watch to avert further killing of the people by the herdsmen.

The state acting governor, who donated the relief materials through the state Executive Secretary, Taraba State Emergency Management Agency, (SEMA), Mr Nuvalga Dan Abuh, expressed sadness over the way suspected gunmen terrorise innocent people in the area, and appealed to the refugees not to avenge the wrong done to them.

According to him, the state government will deploy more security personnel to the affected areas to safeguard life and property.

He therefore appealed to the refugees to be patient and promised that they would be assisted in the best ways possible by the state government just as he urged them to take the current situation as an act of God and forgive their enemies.

Speaking earlier, the council chairman of Takum Local Government, Mr. Tanko Usman Tamtti in his remarks, commended the state government for the gesture rendered to the displaced persons in his area, assuring that the items donated would be utilised for the purpose for which they were intended.

Meanwhile, residents of Makurdi, the Benue State capital, are now living in fear with the information that the Tivs are set for a reprisal attack against Fulani herdsmen.

But in a swift response, the Benue State police command has advised the people of the state to disregard the rumour and go about their lawful businesses without any fear.

Police spokesman in the state, SP Daniel Ezeala, who gave the advice yesterday, noted that there was no such thing.

Ezeala, who stressed that schools and markets would open without any trouble, stated that more policemen led by the DIG (Operations), Mike Zuokomor, have been deployed to the state to ensure safety of life and property.

In another development, Foreign fighters linked with Boko Haram may have infiltrated the rank of Fulani herdsmen blamed for spate of deadly attacks in Benue, Katsina, Taraba,

Kaduna and other parts of the northern region, feelers from security agencies have revealed.

Recent attacks allegedly by Fulani herdsmen had claimed close to 500 lives with attackers reported to be using AK47 and other sophisticated weapons. The attackers are reported to be displaying such professionalism security analysts said was not compatible with herdsmen fighting over grazing lands.

Feelers from security establishments indicated that analysis of the various attacks, the weapons deployed and the manner of operations showed that the herdsmen are receiving external support, the nature of which the security agencies are still investigating.

The puzzle was reported to have deepened when the organisation of Fulani herdsmen openly and repeatedly denied their involvement in the recent multiple killings. A security source who spoke on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to speak on the ongoing investigations said "our analysis points in the direction of external infiltration."

"The weapons used and the professionalism displayed showed that they are trained fighters. We are still reviewing evidence but our preliminary conclusions is that a link is emerging between the insurgency in the North-East and unexplained killings in the North-West," the official said.

It was learnt that the mode of operation of the alleged Fulani herdsmen was similar to the insurgents' tactics in the North-East especially as the attackers normally retreated to reserve forests linking the North-East and North-West along the border with Niger and Chad Republics.

This was said to be similar to the Boko Haram mode of operation who used the reserve forest as a base to attack villages around Maiduguri and other parts of the North-East.

Meanwhile, The Northern States Governors' Forum (NSGF) has called for a new approach to end the incessant clashes between Fulani herdsmen and farmers in some parts of the

North.

Chairman of the forum and governor of Niger State, Dr Mu'azu Babangida Aliyu, made the call in Minna on Sunday while reacting to the killing of about 100 persons in Unguwar Sankwai, Unguwar Gata and Chenshyi villages of Kaura Local Government Area in the southern part of Kaduna State by suspected herdsmen.

The forum's reaction was contained in a statement signed by Governor Aliyu's spokesman, Danladi Ndayebo.

The forum called on the Federal Government to consider a national policy to settle nomads and provide adequate grazing reserves and cattle routes, arguing that grazing re-

serves have proved to be a self sustaining solution for pastoralists across many developed and underdeveloped countries of the world.

"It is the considered opinion of the forum that a national policy be put in place to settle nomads and provide adequate reserves and cattle routes. The advantages of doing so include reintegrating herdsmen into the mainstream society and reducing or even eliminating herdsmen/farmers conflicts," the statement said.

The forum recalled that in pre-colonial times, the influx of Fulani pastoralists into various parts of Northern Nigeria in the 19th century led to establishment of grazing

areas known as Hurumis (communal grazing areas) which were preserved around townships and large villages and protected by Emirate Councils.

The forum further urged the Federal Government to adopt the comprehensive pastoral resource development programme of the defunct Northern Nigeria which established facilities like marketing channels, watering points, veterinary posts and grazing reserves in major pastoral areas of the region.

It lamented that only 36 out of the nation's 415 grazing reserves had been gazetted and urged the Federal Government to take immediate steps to set aside dedicated areas of land for pastoral use.

Awka agog as Obiano takes over from Obi as Anambra gov

BY SAM NWAOKO

GOVERNOR Willie Obiano will today take over from Chief Peter Obi as governor of Anambra State after a week-long activities preparatory to this day.

Obi had hitherto been addressed simply as Mr. Peter Obi until Saturday when he, for the first time in his public-office life accepted to be conferred with the chieftaincy title "Okwute" by a conglomerate of traditional rulers in the state.

He had vowed not to take any chieftaincy title while in office and kept to that until weekend when the Chairman of the state Council of Traditional Rulers and Obi of Onitsha, Igwe Alfred Nnaemeka Achebe with the Igwe of Awka, Eze Gibson Nwosu and the other 175 monarchs in the state officially conferred on him a title he already goes by.

Traditional rulers in the state took turns to eulogise Obi at the ceremony held at the Alex Ekwueme Square in Awka and witnessed by the Chairman of the South East Council of Traditional Rulers, Igwe Chris Ilomuanaya, the Jaja of Opobo, King Dandison Jaja and the Attah of Igala, Michael Idoakwu.

The colourful ceremony was among those that were planned to usher out his historic eight-year reign as governor of Anambra State and signal the beginning of that of Mr. Obiano. There had been a service at the St. Faith Anglican Cathedral, a mass at the St. Patrick's Catholic Cathedral both in

Awka; a cultural display and sundry activities.

It would mark the first time Anambra is witnessing a thing as this because Obi is the first man to win a re-election in the state and he has proved his mettle as he held his own and ensured the emergence of his preferred candidate, who also won the governorship election on October 10 last year.

Although the election is still on contention in the courts, the swearing-in of Obiano today marks the beginning of an era for the state. For instance, the emergence of Obi of the All Progressives Grand Alliance (APGA), first in 2006, eased the grip and dominance of the Peoples Democratic Party in the state and his reelection in February 2010 against all odds, and against the machinations of all the known political heavyweights in the PDP, told a lot of stories in resilience and determination.

His weathering the storm of politics in a state like Anambra for eight years with the successful installation of a successor has proven Obi as a deft politician and administrator. Sources in the state noted that "it seems the opposition is just sleeping and have abandoned the state to the superior politics of Peter Obi." The contention, according to the source, was borne out of what he described as "the lull in their camps as PDP has gone to sleep while the only party making some

whimper is APC. Even one Chief Chika Obidigbo of the same APGA just came up recently and claimed that he was the winner of the party's governorship ticket. But I don't think any of these can hinder the swearing in of Willie Obiano today."

But what comes next for Anambra under a "completely unknown Willie Obiano" is to be seen in the coming four years.

"Obi too came as a 'fleeting' contestant since 2003 and has successfully governed Anambra since 2006. So, there is nothing to fear" has been a refrain in some quarters in the state. They are optimistic that Obiano too would continue in that trend.

Awka is agog for Obiano and Obi and the people are expressing the hope that when Obiano completes his tenure, such things as were said by traditional rulers, religious leaders and many politicians in the state about Obi would be said of him.

Light was thrown on the kind of administration Obi ran in the build up to the October 10 governorship election in the state by the candidate of the APC in the election, Dr. Chris Ngige.

Ngige, who spoke on a live radio programme in Awka said Obi executed some of his programmes and listed some of the programmes to include the handing over of schools to missionaries, the running of hospitals with missions and numerous other programmes.