

# Zamfara massacre: 500 widows, 3,000 children cry for justice



A cross section of the widows and their children.

Babangida Bello, headmaster of Yargaladima Primary School.

Mallama Abida, widow and spokesperson for Yargaladima village widows.

Isa Ahmed, village head of Yargaladima.

One of the abandoned farmlands in Yargaladima.

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A year ago, precisely on 4 April, 2014, hell was let loose at Yargaladima village of Dansadau Emirate, Zamfara State. At about 1:45p.m. when some of the villagers and vigilante members were holding a meeting on how to bring an end to the incessant cattle rustling which had engulfed the area, some hoodlums numbering about 100 attacked them. The attack, according to *Saturday Tribune* findings, led to the death of 250 people. The dead, according to the community, left behind over 500 widows and about 3,000 children. These ones are now demanding for societal care and justice.

A visibly disturbed Senator Saidu Dansadau, who was at the scene of the incident, remarked that the killing was the worst he had ever witnessed since he was born. The state governor, Alhaji Abdulaziz Yari, who was billed to travel out of the country for an official engagement, cut short his trip and returned to Gusau. At the scene of the massacre, the governor vowed to fish out the perpetrators of the dastardly act. He also promised to restore law and order in the troubled village.

It's been over a year since the incident happened and a visit to the small village revealed that the survivors were still finding it difficult to come to terms with what had happened. Speaking in an interview, the village head of Yargaladima, Alhaji Isa Ahmed, affirmed that poverty is ravaging his community as a result of the incident. According to him, since the attack they have only received little assistance from both the federal and state governments. He maintained that even individual assistance was little although N1 million and 400 bags of assorted grains were donated by Senator Kabir Marafa and another 100 bags of assorted grains donated by Honourable Sani Ibrahim.

Even then, he disclosed that the money and grains were still to be shared to his people.

"My people are finding it difficult to survive. They are hungry. Those who cannot stay have left for neighbouring states like Kaduna, Katsina, Sokoto, Kebbi, and Niger states," he said.

He also lamented that the only solar borehole that provides water for the entire community had been vandalised by unknown persons making it difficult for the inhabitants to fetch water.

According to him, "sometimes my people trek between five kilometres and 10 kilometres to get water. I want the constituted authorities to come to our aid."

The traditional ruler also lamented that the only primary health centre which was in a shambles for ages has no facilities and drugs to cater for the people.

Also speaking with *Saturday Tribune*, a widow who gave her name as Mallama Abida Imrana, disclosed that her husband who was their breadwinner was killed in the attack. The mother of five children, who is also the spokesperson for the 500 widows in the town, revealed that there were up to 3,000 fatherless children in the small village.

According to Abida, life has been extremely difficult for them because most of the widows depend on the village head and others for their upkeep.

The widow stated that her late husband's brother who has 18 children is the one caring for her and her five children.

She said that since the unfortunate incident, each one of them had only given one bag of corn.

Abida was annoyed with the neglect especially by the constituted authorities and said that if the relevant authorities refused to carry out their responsibilities, the people would be forced to seek for justice in the law courts.

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"In Islam, provisions are made for people like us because the simple fact is that we are hungry and we need immediate assistance from any quarters," she said.

The headmaster of the only school in the village, Mallam Babangida Bello, also told *Saturday Tribune* that the community held a meeting and it was agreed that every parent who has a child in the school should give N100 that will be used to pay the allowances of the school's two teachers.

Bello disclosed that it was from this donation that the their allowance, which was N10,000, was paid. "I took N6,500 as the headmaster and gave my colleague who is the only teacher N3,500," he said.

Commenting further, he said the school which had an initial enrolment of 300 could now only boast of 100 pupils.

He attributed the drop in number to the failure of parents to contribute the N100 per term for their children and wards.

Commenting further, Bello told *Saturday Tribune* that if the pledge of assistance made by an international agency, Save the Children International, is fulfilled, academic activities in the school would pick up.

"They directed us to compile the list of pupils who have abandoned school. The officials told us they will be paying the N100 for parents who could not afford to pay. In addition, they also indicated their willingness to sew uniform to the pupils," he maintained.

The school headmaster then appealed to other philanthropist organisations as well as wealthy individuals to assist the school by making donations like chalks, exercise books and other instructional materials.

One of the youth who spoke with *Saturday Tribune* on the condition of anonymity also lamented that survival had been difficult for the teeming youth in the village because they could no longer go to their farms for fear of being attacked by rustlers. He said that most of them depend on these farms to feed.

"It is true that our village is being supervised by some mobile policemen, but the truth of the matter is that it's a pity the government has not done enough to restore total peace," he stated.