

Killer herdsmen in Ondo communities: Set farms, villages ablaze in Molege

.Petrol dealer shot dead in Okeluse

Communities in Ose Local Government Area of Ondo State recently witnessed the return of killer herdsmen, leading to the loss of lives in three attacks within 10 days. HAKEEM GBADAMOSI writes on the effect of the siege and steps taken by the state government and security agencies to forestall recurrence.



Houses razed in the affected communities



THE month of January will not be forgotten in a hurry by residents of three communities; Molege, Arimogija and Okeluse in Ose Local Government Area of Ondo state, where suspected Fulani herdsmen massacred and dislodged the defenceless residents, injuring scores and sending fears to other members of the neighbouring communities. At the end of these attacks, the gunmen had killed 10 people within 10 days while one of the communities was also set ablaze, leaving hundreds of residents homeless and the villages deserted.

The rampaging herdsmen reportedly invaded Molege community in the middle of the night, killed at least three people, including the community head and set the village and their farms on fire, destroying property worth millions of Naira. The attack, according to some of the residents was as a result of the refusal of the farmers and villagers to allow the herders and their cows to feed from their farmlands.

One of the residents, Mr. Elijah Ayodeji, who said the villagers were awoken by the sporadic shooting from the invaders gunshot, stated that the community head and two other people were not lucky as they were killed in the attack.

According to the villagers, the Fulani herders were about 50 in number and were fully armed, adding that after killing the three persons, they came back 30 minutes later to set the entire village ablaze.

Narrating how the incident happened, the Akarigbo of Ute Land, Chief Felix Olabode said, "I was home when we heard that some gunmen came and killed people here. We came here immediately and we met dead bodies. These buildings have not been razed. But when we alerted the Police, the DPO came and we didn't know that these people were still around. Not less than 30 minutes after the Police evacuated the dead bodies; the gunmen came back and razed these buildings. They always use guns to scare people away and then bring their cows to graze on people's farm and drink water. When they are done, they also use guns to scare people away on their way out. People have left, see the level of damage, we are begging

the government to come to our rescue."

It was gathered that men of the Amotekun Corps in the area, who were alerted by residents that escaped from the village, mobilised to the scene only to be attacked in the middle of the forest by the gunmen who engaged them in a duel.

The Commander of the Amotekun Corps, Chief Adetunji Adeleye, said "while on a routine patrol today at Molege in Ose Local Government Area of Ondo State, our men were informed that some nearby villages in Molege have been taken over by herdsmen while they burnt down some people's properties. We moved in with three patrol vehicles and took control of the situation in the village. On our way back, some men suspected to be herdsmen suddenly opened fire on our men in an unprovoked attack. Though they escaped, we are still on their trail"

The state governor, Mr. Rotimi Akeredolu, immediately after the attack visited the community with a pledge to bring the perpetrators to justice, but less than 72 hours after the attack on Molege community, the Fulani herdsmen, again invaded the neighbouring Arimogija community around 2pm, killing five people on the farm while several others were left injured.

According to one of the community youths, Adams Osho, the news of the attack on some farmers by the herdsmen filtered into the village and the youths and some members of the vigilante mobilised to the farm, where three people had already been killed. He, however,

said the herdsmen who sensed that some of the farmers who escaped from the farm might mobilise to the farm, laid siege in the bush, killing two other people from the team when they swooped on them unexpectedly, adding that the Fulani herdsmen ran away immediately, leaving some other people injured, while the community youth leader, Lucky Augustine was killed.

Recounting the incident, the youth Secretary of Arimogija, Mr. Nweke Izuchukwu Jude, disclosed that five youths were killed in two different attacks by Fulani herdsmen, adding that "they attacked the first set of people on the farm and killed two of them. It was those injured in the first attack that called other villagers for help. But while those who went to rescue them were trying to take the injured back home for treatment, the armed herders appeared again and killed three more people. The armed Fulani men are still in our bushes and farmlands; we can no longer go to our farms.

"They know the topography of the forest more than us, all we need is the support of security men to chase them away and arrest as many as possible. This has been happening for long. They are always coming with AK 47, they were more than 50. One Amotekun officer was shot during the attack. They came and killed the Baale, police came and evacuated the dead bodies and some few minutes later, they came back and razed this place," he said.

But 10 days after the two attacks, another community in the area, Okeluse witnessed

another attack by gunmen who came on three motorcycles, killing two people at a petrol station, including the owner of the petrol station, identified as Aborowa Oladimeji, also known as "Popular."

According to the source, the owner of the petrol station and his members of staff were closing for the day around 9pm when the men arrived at the station and shot sporadically; they tried to run away but the gunmen shot dead two of the people at the station, including Aborowa Oladimeji, who was shot at close range, and died on the spot while the gunmen left the scene immediately.

The source said the gunmen were Fulani herdsmen, adding that "the sales boy who was also shot by the herdsmen was rushed to the hospital but gave up the ghost the next morning. The owner was shot and he died on the spot. He was about leaving the filling station with his sales boy when the gunmen came."

Lamenting over the incessant attacks on people of the area, the lawmaker representing Owo/Ose Federal Constituency, Hon. Timohin Adelebe, condemned the attack, describing it as barbaric. He noted that the hoodlums always descended on innocent and defenceless people who were going about their farming activities legitimately, noting that "I initiated and executed the rehabilitation of Arimogija/Molege/Okeluse road last year when the terrorists masquerading as herdsmen kidnapped about six villagers at the failed portions of the road to dislodge them from the road."

He however added that there was need for a security post at the junction "to checkmate the senseless attacks on the innocent villagers" and said efforts are in motion to set to construct a Security Post at the Junction to further guarantee security of lives and property in the area.

"It has become a matter of urgent importance to provide other logistics such as vehicle to facilitate the patrol of the area by security personnel to ward off further invasion by the bandits," Adelebe said, appealing to the people not to resort to self help but report any suspicious movement to law enforcement



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