

23 killed as herders go on reprisal in Benue

Johnson Babajide | Makurdi

ABOUT 23 people, including a policeman, were killed in separate communities in Logo and Ukum local government areas of Benue State after local residents and herders clashed.

It was gathered that 17 locals, five herders and a policeman, were killed during the attacks that occurred between Tuesday and the early hours of Wednesday.

It was further gathered that the locals on Tuesday allegedly killed five herders in three separate areas and

rustled cows, butchered and shared them in some communities around Logo council area, just as the herders returned for a reprisal at Gbeji in Ukum council area.

The Commissioner of Police in the state, Wale Abass, who confirmed the attacks, said the crisis started on Tuesday and there was a reprisal on Wednesday.

The police boss said: "Two Fulani were coming from Taraba and were on Keke NAPP after the boundary line when they [locals] stopped them and killed them."

"Simultaneously, close to Anyin in Logo Local Government Area, another

two Fulani were attacked and killed; also at another village, one of the herders rearing cows was attacked and killed, after which they [locals] rustled his cows, butchered and shared them.

"So when this happened and we got wind of it; we were just planning to meet and placate the Fulani through their leader, the Miyetti Allah, so as to avoid any reprisal, but unknown to us that they had their plan.

"At about 7:00a.m. Wednesday, they [Fulani] bombarded [stormed] Gbeji; fired sporadically and unfortunately, a stray bullet hit one of our officers and he

died."

Abass said as of the time he spoke with the *Nigerian Tribune*, 10 people, including the policeman and five herders, had lost their lives.

He added that with the deployment of combined security operatives, normalcy had returned to Gbeji community.

He said operatives of the command were already on the trail of both the locals and herders who perpetrated the attacks.

Meanwhile, the security adviser to the Benue State Governor, Lieutenant-Colonel Paul Hemba (retd), who spoke with newsmen later

in the day, confirmed the death of 18 people, including a policeman.

He, however, said he was not aware of the killing of five herdsman by the locals.

Hemba said: "As for reprisal, I have not got any report about the killing of Fulani. I am still trying to make enquiry. I was woken up at about 12:45a.m. today [Wednesday] and informed that an attack was ongoing at Gbeji.

"I alerted security agencies and they all responded to the distress call and that helped in reducing the casualties. The security agencies, including the Department of

State Services (DSS), all responded.

"The verifiable figure that I have now given to me with pictures by the chairman of the council area who was at the scene, is 18, including two policemen."

He added that the figures could even get much higher.

Hemba said those injured were taken to the local government health centre at Afia, while the bodies of the deceased were taken to NKST Hospital, also in Afia.

He added those seriously injured were already being moved to the Teaching Hospital in Makurdi, the state capital.

15 die in Sokoto