

# 30 killed as rival militia groups clash in Benue

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**T**HE Force Commander of Operation Whirl Stroke (QPWS), Major-General Sunday Igbinomwanhia, has said that 30 people were killed in the clash between members of rival militias in Ukum Local Government Area of Benue State on Tuesday.

Fielding questions from journalists during a press conference at the Old Banquet Hall, Government House, Makurdi, on Wednesday, Major-General Igbinomwanhia said: "It was a clash between two militia groups resulting into deaths. We went there and for whatever reason they

had the clash, I don't know.

"But our initial visit revealed that 30 people were killed."

It was earlier gathered that the incident occurred when members of two militia groups identified as 'Full Fire' and 'Chain' engaged in supremacy battle.

Many of the casualties were said to be members of the militia groups, but some farmers, among them a family of seven, were caught up in the crisis.

A traditional ruler in the area who did not want his name mentioned for fear of being a target told newsmen on the phone on Wednesday that the clash started on Tuesday morning.

He said a Tiv militia leader in Ukum council area had ab-

ducted another militia leader, identified as Alhaji Gana and members of his family, who were known for banditry and kidnappings from neighbouring Chinkai community in Wukari Local Government Area of Taraba State.

The traditional ruler said: "After kidnapping them, the Tiv militia leader asked for N100 million ransom but was given N5 million. However, after collecting the money, he killed the hostages."

"The murder sparked outrage among members of the rival gang in Taraba State. This occurred over the weekend."

"What followed was that another militia leader in Ukum now join forces with the militia gang in Taraba to help them

eliminate the rival gang in Ukum who killed Alhaji Gana.

"This was to enable him be the head of the militia in Ukum. The combined forces of the Taraba and Tiv militia gangs started moving into the bushes of Gbagir in their hundreds from Sunday to attack the gang that killed Alhaji Gana and on Tuesday morning, the fight started."

"From what we gathered, over 40 people, who were mainly bandits, were killed, though we have record of about 12 farmers who were caught in the crossfire. Over 30 others were injured, while some are also missing."

"Sadly, caught in the crossfire was a family of seven; they were all members of the

Adzandeh family.

"The armed men have also moved to the bushes of Gbeji, Chito and Afia in their numbers but cannot move into the residential areas because of the timely intervention of troops of Operation Whirl Stroke (OPWS)."

When contacted, the member representing Ukum state constituency in the Benue State House of Assembly, Niyiyongo Ezra, said about 20 people were killed in the clash.

Commissioner of Police in the state, Emmanuel Adesina, who also declined to give details of the crisis, said more personnel had been deployed in the area, just as he added that five corpses had been recovered.

Earlier, a military source told newsmen in Makurdi on Wednesday that some of the attacks were by local militia men.

He said: "These are militia men killing themselves. Yes, we acknowledge that probably one or two people may have been caught in the crossfire, but the majority of the people who were killed were members of the militia gangs in the area."

"We are currently in Kwande trying to contain the situation and normalcy has been restored to the area."

"We have been able to flush the hoodlums out of the area. However, our troops are in Ukum to ensure that the attack does not affect innocent people."