

Bandits kill over 30 villagers, two policemen in Benue

Johnson Babajide | Makurdi

OVER 30 people, including two policemen, were reportedly killed in Ayati village in Ukum Local Government Area of Benue State on Thursday night.

The state governor, Reverend Father Hyacinth Alia, on Friday, decried the killing despite the large number of security operatives there.

Governor Alia expressed sadness over what he described as another unprovoked attack on Ayati.

In a statement by his Chief Press Secretary, Kula Tersoo, Alia condemned the attack while vowing to take justice to the bandits.

The statement reads in part: "The governor expresses worry that such heinous act has continued in the state despite strong security presence and the regular dialogue sessions his administration has been holding with stakeholders and traditional rulers seeking the return of peace in Sankera.

"He, however, makes a firm determination to continue to use lawful procedures to protect Benue people, particularly Ukum which has been on the front line of attacks lately.

"The governor calls on security personnel to improve their surveillance and also ensure that vulnerable communities are not left unguarded while the government awaits the judicial commission of inquiry to bring out its findings.

"He consoles families that lost their loved ones in the attack, saying his thoughts of comfort and prayers are with them and with the entire people of Ukum Local Government.

Governor Alia adds that his

administration will continue to explore both discreet and open measures with a view to ensuring that Sankera retraces her path of peace and live happily again."

Locals told newsmen on Friday that the attack was allegedly carried out by local bandits, in conjunction with Fulani herders.

One of the natives told Saturday Tribune anonymously that a factional group of bandits had banded with Fulani herders to attack the community.

A community leader in the area and a former governorship aspirant in the state, Shima Ayati, also confirmed the attack to newsmen.

According to him, more than 30 corpses have been recovered from the village.

He said: "What I heard is that some bandits received money from some herders to graze their animals in two council wards.

"As they were grazing, they came in conflict with farmers who ran to the government. The government sent security operatives who went and chased the herders away. They burnt the herders' makeshift tents.

"The herders became angry as they claimed to have given money for the land. They went back to the bandits and joined hands with the bandits to attack the village and massacre the people.

"We have already gathered over 30 corpses. They are still searching."

Also confirming the incident, the Commissioner for Information, Culture and Tourism in the state, Mathew Abo, also an indigene of Ukum Local Government Area, said about 30 bodies had so far been recovered.