

22 feared killed as suspected militants invade Edo communities

by **Idahosa Moses** February 24, 2025 in **Metro** Reading Time: 5 mins read

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Death toll has risen to 22 as suspected armed militants invaded seven farming communities in Ovia South-West Local Government Area in Edo State.

Tribune Online gathered that several others sustained varying degrees of injuries, while buildings and farm produce worth several million naira were set ablaze by the assailants.

The incident reportedly occurred on Friday, 21st February 2025.

The affected communities include Marindoti, Gbelemontin Domiju, Kola Village, Taiye Camp, Eto Camp, Dipe, Bala Dele, and Thousand.

The Tribune Online learnt that the communities were predominantly inhabited by farmers from various ethnic backgrounds, including Yoruba, Hausa, Igbo, and Benin.

A source who spoke on condition of anonymity alleged that the assailants, suspected to be Ijaw militants from nearby creeks, stormed the settlements early in the morning armed with firearms and other weapons.

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He said the attackers unleashed terror by shooting indiscriminately, setting houses ablaze, and destroying property, including motorcycles and vehicles.

He added that the incident had forced residents to flee the communities en masse, abandoning their homes and livelihoods.

Another source alleged that the attack was a reprisal for the killing of a suspected cocoa thieves by local vigilantes employed by the farmers.

He said the incident had heightened existing tensions between the farmers and the alleged militants, who had previously been accused of encroaching on farmland and stealing produce.

An eyewitness who visited the scene observed a mass exodus of displaced persons carrying their belongings as they sought refuge in safer areas.

He said many homes had been reduced to ashes, and the once-thriving farming communities now resembled ghost towns.

Speaking with journalists, Igbala Obazuaye, the head of Marindoti community, said they had been farming in the area for years, but trouble began when some youths started demanding royalties from them.

According to him: "Trouble started in 1998 when some youths began encroaching on our land, stealing our crops, and kidnapping our people, despite the payment of royalties."

Obazuaye, who sustained bullet wounds, stated that the assailants invaded the community around 8 am, killing seven people in his community alone.

He, however, appealed for military protection, the establishment of a local police station, and assistance in rebuilding their communities.

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Also speaking, Nafisat Abdulazeez, a resident of Dipe community, described the experience as traumatic, calling for the immediate intervention of Edo State Governor Monday Okpebholo.

Abdulazeez said about 15 people were killed in Dipe community, while several others had gone missing.

“They came into our community, shooting and burning houses. They killed 15 people, and many more were injured.

“They even burnt my own house, and my family was forced to flee,” she said.

Joseph Otu, a resident of Marindoti Community and a farmer, refuted the claim that the attack was a communal clash, insisting it was an unprovoked assault by militants aiming to extort and terrorise peaceful farmers.

He also urged authorities to deploy security forces to safeguard the area, highlighting the communities’ significant contributions to the state’s economy through the cultivation of crops such as cocoa, kola nuts, and plantains.

On his part, Usman Mukaila of Dipe community praised the immediate deployment of soldiers from the 4 Brigade of the Nigerian Army by Brigadier General Ebenezer Oduyebo, calling for the establishment of a permanent military presence in the area.

“We commend the Commander of the 4 Brigade of the Nigerian Army, Benin, for the immediate intervention and deployment of soldiers.

“That has helped to calm the situation for now. If not for him, the rest of the people would have gone. We also thank the governor.

“We, however, urge him to establish a permanent military base in this area. We are crying out for help; we really need his assistance. You can see all our women and children leaving,” he said.

Recall that the Edo State Police Command had earlier in the day confirmed that seven people were killed and six injured.

A statement by the Public Relations Officer of the Command, Moses Yamu, said a preliminary investigation suggested a communal clash.

Yamu stated that operatives of the Iguobazuwa Police Division, in collaboration with the Nigerian Army and the vigilantes, had evacuated the casualties to hospital, where the injured were receiving treatment.

“The joint operation is ongoing, and the situation has been brought under control, with normalcy restored. However, an investigation into the cause of the clash has commenced,” he said.

He added that the Commissioner of Police in the state, Betty Eneken Isokpan Otimenyin, had vowed that no stone would be left unturned in uncovering the circumstances surrounding the unfortunate and avoidable incident.

Tribune Online reports that the crisis in the agrarian communities started in Gbelemotin Community in Ovia South-West Local Government Area in Edo State where five people were reportedly killed by suspected vigilante members.

A source in the locality who pleaded anonymity said that the crisis started on Thursday when an Ikale Cocoa farmers (name withheld) hired some vigilantes to guard his Cocoa farm said to be under heavy poaching by some suspected Ijaw thieves

The development, it was learned, led to the killing of five persons said to be of Ijaw extraction. Suspected sympathizers of the victims allegedly staged a counterattack, resulting in the deaths of several people on Friday.

