

# Killings by herdsmen: Soyinka lambasts FG, death toll in Taraba rises

**Published** January 11, 2018



Share



Prof. Wole Soyinka

**Gbenga Adeniji, Adelani Adepegba, Olaleye Aluko and Justin Tyopuusu**

Renowned playwright, Prof. Wole Soyinka, says the Federal Government is responsible for the wanton killings perpetrated by Fulani herdsmen in the country.

Soyinka in a statement on Wednesday titled, ‘Holy Cow: Impunity Rides Again,’ said the government was “looking the other way” as the herdsmen went on the rampage across the country.

**READ ALSO:** [Impunity rides again, by Wole Soyinka](#)

He said, “Yes, indeed the government is culpable, definitely guilty of “looking the other way. Indeed, it must be held complicit.”

The Nobel laureate said history was repeating itself with the herdsmen’s case, recalling that Boko Haram was still at that stage of “putative probes when cries of alarm emerged.”

Soyinka said, “Boko Haram was a product of social inequities, they preached – one even chortled: ‘We stand for justice, so we are all Boko Haram!’ We warned that – yes indeed – the inequities of society were indeed part of the story, but why do you close your eyes against other, and more critical malfunctions of the human mind, such as theocratic lunacy? Now it is happening again. The nation is being smothered in Vaseline when the diagnosis is so clearly – cancer!

“We have been here before – now, ‘before’ is back with a vengeance. President Goodluck Jonathan refused to accept that marauders had carried off the nation’s daughters; President Muhammed Buhari and his government – including his Inspector-General of Police – in near identical denial, appear to believe that killer herdsmen who strike again and again at will from one corner of the nation to the other, are merely hot-tempered citizens whose scraps occasionally degenerate into communal clashes – I believe I have summarised him accurately. The marauders are naughty children who can be admonished, paternalistically, into good neighbourly conduct.

“Sometimes of course, the killers were also said to be non-Nigerians after all. The contradictions are mind-boggling.”

The acclaimed writer recalled that a more hideous massacre was perpetrated by the group he termed Murder Incorporated during a peace meeting in Benue in 2016, describing the development as a climax to what had been a series across a number of Middle Belt and neighbouring states, with Benue taking the brunt of the butchery.

He noted that the peace meeting attended by the state government and security agencies, including the Inspector-General of Police, also had the herdsmen in attendance.

He added, “They freely admitted the killings but justified them by claims that they had lost their cattle to the host community. It is important to emphasise that none of their spokesmen referred to any government neglect, such as refusal to pay subsidy for their cows or failure to accord them the same facilities that had been extended to cassava or millet farmers. Such are the monstrous beginnings of the culture of impunity. We are reaping, yet again, the consequences of such tolerance of the intolerable.”

Warning against what he described as the “enervating lure of appeasement in face of aggression and will to dominate,” the playwright also drew attention to Volume III of his Interventions Series, and to the chapter on ‘The Unappeasable Price of Appeasement.’

Soyinka said, “There is little to add, but it does appear that even the tragically fulfilled warnings of the past leave no impression on leadership, not even when identical signs of impending cardiac arrest loom over the nation.”

He recalled that the first active policy of appeasement and the language of endorsement came when Kaduna State Governor, Nasir el-Rufai, on assuming office, proudly said he had raised a peace committee and successfully traced the herdsmen to locations outside Nigerian borders.

Soyinka added that the governor said he made payments to them from state coffers to cure them of their homicidal urge which, according to the herdsmen, were reprisals for some ancient history and the loss of cattle through rustling.

He said, “The public was up in arms against this astonishing revelation. I could only call to mind a statement by the same el-Rufai after a prior election which led to a rampage in parts of the nation, and cost even the lives of National Youth Service Corps members. They were hunted down by aggrieved mobs and even states had to organise rescue missions for their citizens. Countering protests that the nation owed a special duty of protection to her youth, especially those who are co-opted to serve the nation in any capacity, El Rufai’s comment then was: No life is more important than another. Today, that statement needs to be adjusted, to read perhaps – apologies to George Orwell: “All lives are equal, but a cow’s is more equal than others.”

Disclosing that though he called on the government a week ago to stop passing the buck over the fuel crisis, Soyinka stated that he never intended that a reverse policy should lead to exonerating – or appearing to exonerate mass killers, rapists and economic saboteurs.

According to him, the conduct of the saboteurs subverts the efforts of others to economically secure their own existence and drives other producers off their land in fear and terror.

“This promises the same plague of starvation that afflicts zones of conflict all over this continent where liberally sown landmines prevent farmers from venturing near their prime source, the farm, often their only source of livelihood, and has created a whole population of amputees. At least, those victims in Angola, Mozambique and other former war theatres, mostly lived to tell the tale. These herdsmen, arrogant and unconscionable, have adopted a scorched-earth policy, so that those other producers – the cassava, cocoa, sorghum, rice farmers are brutally expelled from farm and dwelling.

“Government neglect? You may not have intended it, but you made it sound like the full story. I applaud the plans of your ministry, I am in a position to know that much thought – and practical steps – have gone into long term plans for bringing about the creation of ‘ranches’, ‘colonies’ – whatever the name – including the special cultivation of fodder for animal feed and so on and on. However, the present national outrage is over impunity. It rejects the right of any set of people, for whatever reason, to take arms against their fellow men and women, to acknowledge their exploits in boastful and justifying accents and, in effect, promise more of the same as long as their terms and demands are not met. In plain

language, they have declared war against the nation, and their weapon is undiluted terror. Why have they been permitted to become a menace to the rest of us? That is the issue!”

Soyinka said he was unaware that the Indigenous People of Biafra came anywhere close to the Fulani herdsmen’s homicidal propensity and will to dominate before it was declared a terrorist organisation.

He said, “How do we categorise Miyetti? How do we assess a mental state that cannot distinguish between a stolen cow – which is always recoverable – and human life, which is not? Villages have been depopulated far wider than those outside their operational zones can conceive. They swoop on sleeping settlements, kill and strut. They glory in their seeming supremacy.

“These crimes are treated like the norm. Once again, the nation is being massaged by specious rationalisations while the rampage intensifies and the spread spirals out of control. When we open the dailies tomorrow morning (today), there is certain to have been a new body count, to be followed by the arrogant justification of the Miyetti Allah.”

Saying that President Goodluck Jonathan only saw ‘ghosts’ when Boko Haram was already excising swathes of territory from the nation space and abducting school pupils, he added that the ghosts of Jonathan seemed poised to haunt the tenure of President Muhammed Buhari.

### **Residents put Taraba’s death toll at 56**

Residents said the death toll from the killing of people of Taraba communities by Fulani herdsmen have risen to 56 on Wednesday, as survivors continued to recount tales of sorrows.

Some armed Fulani herdsmen had on Friday and Saturday attacked many communities in the Lau Local Government Area of the state, including Donaddo, Lavoro, Katibu, Didango and Maku, leaving blood in their trail.

The attack in Lau villages came barely 24 hours after suspected herdsmen killed a family of five and seven others in the Wukari and Gassol local government areas of the state.

The residents of the affected communities in Lau LGA said the death toll in the attack had hit 56 persons, mostly children and women, while over 200 houses were recorded to have been burnt.

They called on the Federal Government to declare Fulani herdsmen a terror group, just as 29 of the victims killed in the attacks on Donaddo, Lavoro, Katibu, Didango and Maku communities in the Lau LGA were on Wednesday given a mass burial in Katibu and Didango.

The affected communities on Wednesday remained deserted as residents had fled; and it was gathered that only security personnel deployed in the area were visible.

One of the affected residents, Mr. Sani Marafa, who said six of his relations were among those given the mass burial, added that the attackers were over 100.

“They attacked us at about 3pm on Friday and Saturday, killing people and setting them on fire. Six of my relations are among the victims. I almost could not recognise my relations after the killer Fulani attack my village

“The government must deploy soldiers in Taraba immediately to contain this situation. The attackers were well armed and I don’t think the police have the capacity to deal with them.

“As I speak to you, all our houses, foodstuffs and other valuable items have been destroyed. Many families here are passing through serious trauma,” he said.

Another resident of one of the attacked communities, Mrs. Paulina Habila, a mother of four, said apart from killing her husband, the Fulani herdsmen made her homeless.

She said, “The Federal Government have failed to protect us here. My husband was slaughtered like a goat by the Fulani men who invaded our village. They killed over 35 people in our village alone and razed the entire community.”

Another victim of the attack, Pastor Titus Makovini, said, “The killers came into the community church and they slaughtered some worshipers, while others fled.

“The security personnel failed to protect us for the two days that the attackers laid siege to our communities.”

A survivor of the attack, who gave her name simply as Joy, said she escaped death by a whisker when the armed herdsmen struck.

Joy, who lamented the death of her 69-year-old mother and other relations in the attack, said, “The Federal Government must find a lasting solution to this senseless and mindless killing of innocent people by rampaging herdsmen.”

However, the state Police Public Relations Officer, ASP David Misal, said 12 people were killed during the attack on the communities.

“The attack happened on Friday and Saturday, but because the attackers were still laying siege to the communities, bodies of the dead could not be recovered and buried until we provided security for them to do so.

“Our men are currently on the ground in the area and the situation is now under control,” he said.

On his part, Senior Special Assistant to the Governor on Media and Publicity, Mr. Bala Abu, told our correspondent that 29 corpses were recovered from burnt houses, bush paths and nearby farms where the victims tried to hide from the killer Fulani herdsmen.

“It is really a disturbing sight. A combined team of armed soldiers and policemen have to provide security cover for the villagers to enable them conduct the funeral rites for the dead,” he added.

The Permanent Secretary, Taraba State Emergency Management Agency, Mr. Nulvaga Danhabu, said the state government had provided relief materials to the Internally Displaced Persons who fled the areas for safety.

“The IDPs from the Lau crisis are currently camping in Kufai, Mayo Dassa and the Federal Character Commission office in Jalingo, Mayo-Lope and Abari Lau. In the days ahead, we will see what we can do to alleviate their sufferings,” he said.

### **Killings going on in Benue despite IG presence –Group**

A group, Community Development Coalition, has raised the alarm that Fulani herdsmen are still carrying out killings in the Guma and Logo local government areas of Benue State.

The group added that the atrocities were occurring despite the deployment of police operatives and soldiers and the relocation of the Inspector-General of Police, Idris Ibrahim, to the state.

The CDC Convener, Prof. Yima Sen, told journalists in Abuja on Wednesday, that he had visited the affected communities and was informed that attacks by the herdsmen had not abated.

*Continued from page 7* Sen noted that the security forces on the ground had been unable to stop the bloodshed across the state.

“I left the crisis area about five hours ago and from my consultations with the people, killings are still going on. I am not satisfied with the security situation; I have also consulted with the people and they are not satisfied with the situation,” he said.

The CDC said it would do all that was legally possible to ensure the full implementation of the Benue State Anti-open Grazing Prohibition Law.

It said it would also facilitate “the emergence of a robust, reliable and sustainable community-driven security system.”

The group rejected the proposed cattle colonies for herdsmen by the Federal Government, insisting that no inch of Benue land would be given out to the herdsmen.

Sen said, “We can’t be colonised by the Fulani; they can ranch, but if anyone is talking about cattle colonies, they should find another location, not Benue.”

The CDC convener accused President Muhammadu Buhari of turning a blind eye to the atrocities of the herdsmen.

He said, “We are left with no option than to conclude that the President, who by the way is the grand patron of Miyetti Allah, has turned a blind eye and is bent on keeping deaf ears to these atrocities.”

A former Director-General, Bureau of Public Enterprise, Bernard Verr, argued that the open grazing of cattle constituted a danger to the nation’s agriculture, food security and the economic diversification programme of the government.

When asked about the reported killings, the state Commissioner of Police, Bashir Makama, said he was not aware, adding that the CDC should furnish him with the names of the communities so he could ascertain the claims.

### **DHQ coordinates response to Benue killings**

The Defence Headquarters, Abuja, is coordinating the deployment of more ground and air troops to curb the crises in parts of Benue State, sources told our correspondent on Wednesday.

Although the DHQ had yet to make any official statement, our correspondent learnt that more troops had joined in the operation going by the “orders from above.”

It was learnt that the army had detailed troops from the 93 Battalion, Takum, Taraba State, and the 72 Special Forces Battalion, Makurdi, Benue State, while the air force is deploying assets from the Tactical Command, Nigerian Air Force, Makurdi.



The source said, “It is the Defence Headquarters that is coordinating the response to the Benue crisis. The army and the air force have deployed men in the troubled areas. I cannot give you the number of the troops because they are drawn from bases in the region.

“The figures of the armed gang members run into 100s. More arrests will still be made.”