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Benue killings: If FG can't protect us, we will raise an army, says Unongo

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Scenes from the burial service held at IBB Square in Makurdi for Benue residents slain by herdsmen ... on Thursday. Photos: Olatunji

Obasa

Olalekan Adetayo, John Charles, Justin Tyopuusu, Umar Muhammed

Many residents of Makurdi in mourning gathered on Thursday at the IBB Square as bodies of the victims of the Fulani herdsmen attacks of January 1 and 2, 2018, in parts of Benue State were given a mass burial.

Offices, commercial banks, markets and schools were closed in the state capital as the government had, a day earlier, declared Thursday, a work-free day in honour of the 73 victims.

A leader of the Tiv nation and the chairman of the Northern Elders Forum, Wantaregh Unongo, said if President Muhammadu Buhari failed in his responsibility of protecting lives and property of Benue citizens, the people would train their own army in the state to defend them.

Unongo recalled that a large number of Benue sons and daughters were among the contingents that fought the Nigerian civil war.

“Benue people sacrificed blood for the unity of this country and will not allow a section of Fulani herdsmen to kill our people in cold blood.

He said, “I am telling Nigerians that my people cannot continue to be cannon fodder for this country. If the government can’t protect us, we will mobilise and train our people into an army to defend us. We are 100 per cent in support of what Governor Samuel Ortom has done. I am the spiritual and ancestral leader of the Tiv nation; enough is enough.”

Unongo stressed that the entire people of the state were watching President Buhari and had joined in the persistence calls by Ortom that the Federal Government should take drastic steps to urgently address the killings and also arrest the leader of Miyetti Allah Kautal Hore.

“If the Federal Government cannot stop or arrest those behind the killings; in two weeks, we shall raise an army of our own. We cannot allow people to colonise us again, we have all it takes to do that,” Unongo said.

Also speaking, a former military governor of Plateau and Katsina states, Maj. Gen. Lawrence Onoja(retd.), who described the killings in the state as genocidal conspiracy against the Benue people, emphasised that the killings must not continue.

The Benue-born general said, “Some of us, in 1966, fought the Nigerian civil war; Benue has contributed to the unity of this country. If the Federal Government refuses to address the killings in Benue and if we decide to raise our army as advocated by our elders to defend ourselves, I will not mind to command that army despite my age.”

daughters of the state to rally round the governor for the successful enforcement of the anti-open grazing law.

A former member of the National Assembly, Senator J.K.N. Waku, maintained that the Benue people were known for peace, love and honour.

He said, ‘‘It is unfortunate that someone would oppose a law that is legally enacted and begin to kill and the Federal Government will refuse to make arrests to end the carnage. The provocation is enough; nobody has the monopoly of killing.’’

Speaking on behalf of the Benue State House of Assembly, the Majority leader, Benjamin Adeniyi, expressed sadness that Buhari came to Benue State during electioneering and after he was elected, he looked the other way while Benue people were being killed.

A former governor of Benue State, George Akume, urged Buhari to declare a faction of the Miyietti Allah as terrorists, saying the action of its members showed they were terrorists.

He appealed to people living in Benue communities not to take the law into their own hands, but follow the path of peace and reconciliation.

The representative of the United Nations, Dr Mathins Ejibike, offered his condolences to the government and people of the state, saying what was happening in Benue required international attention.

‘‘We want an enlightened approach to this matter. We should pray that this killing should be the last in Benue State.’’

He stated that the UN had received a report that over 20,000 refugees were already in camps and promised that the body would look into their plight.

In his speech, the paramount ruler of Tiv nation, Prof. James Ayatse, claimed that Tiv people residing in Nasarawa and Taraba states were being killed by Fulani herdsmen on a daily basis since the Benue killings started.

‘‘We must put an end to these killings. This is the 47th time that Fulani people would attack the Benue people.’’

Ortom, in his remarks, said the latest killing was the most heartless.

He said, “If the herdsmen think that the killing of our people will make us to stop the enforcement of the law, they have failed. We will not be deterred because I am ready to pay the supreme price for the implementation of the anti-open grazing law. I will continue to insist on the arrest of the factional leader of Miyetti Allah Kautal Hore.”

Ortom rejected the idea of creating a cattle colony or grazing routes for herdsmen.

He said the suggestions were not acceptable to the Benue people.

He explained that the state did not have adequate land for farmers, not to talk of space for grazing.

Also speaking, the state Chairman, Christian Association of Nigeria, Rev. Akpe Leva, commended the governor for signing the anti-open grazing law.

Taraba anti-open grazing law starts Jan 24, death toll hits 60

The Taraba State Governor, Mr. Darius Ishaku, has said the state anti-open grazing law is not targeted at any religious group or tribe.

In a statement by his Senior Special Assistant on Public Affairs, Emmanuel Bello, the governor explained that the law was colour blind.

The statement explained that the implementation of the Taraba State Anti-Open Grazing and Ranches Establishment Law, which was enacted in June 2017, was expected to commence on January 24, 2018, at the expiration of the six months grace period.

Ishaku in the statement noted that cattle ownership in Taraba State was not the exclusive preserve of any religion, tribe or group, adding that the law was to, among other things, change the mode of production of cattle for better yield.

way to better methods with the use of tractors and better seedlings, among other things.

“This can happen to cattle rearing too. The ancient method of nomadic voyages has failed to give better milk production or even beef. Cows are leaner and less productive when made to go through the rigours of long distant treks. Elsewhere, ranching has become the best form of attending to the need of cattle in the world.

“Even here in Nigeria, top cow owners have seen the wisdom in ranching. In Taraba, cow owners on the Mambilla have been engaging in a form of ranching, dating into the past. It is nothing new to us and I enjoined all to key into it,” the statement read in part.

Meanwhile, the death toll in the last weekend attack on several communities in the Lau Local Government Area of Taraba State has risen to 60.

Residents on Wednesday had put the figure at 56, but four more bodies were said have been later recovered by some youths and hunters from Katibu and Didango villages.

Dauda Marafa, a community leader and a civil servant with the Taraba State Government told one of our correspondents on the telephone that the four bodies were recovered when the youth went back to the villages to check for more of the missing persons.

“The bodies were recovered on Wednesday evening, but could not be buried until today (Thursday) because the youths were attacked by some gunmen.

“We mobilised a team of soldiers who accompanied the youths and some family members of the deceased for burial at Katibu. The situation in the area is still fearful,” he said.

The state police spokesman, David Missal, said he had yet to get any update on the crisis in Lau LGA.

“I am not aware of any attack and recovery of more bodies in the area because have not received any briefing from the Divisional Police Officer from the area,” he said.

‘Benue attack displaces 18,000 people in Nasarawa’

The Special Adviser to Governor Umaru Al-Makura on Security Matter, Brig. Gen. Mohammed Adeka (retd.), stated this at a press conference on Thursday in Lafia, the Nasarawa State capital.

Adeka said the reports received showed that the spillover of the attacks on some communities in Benue State led to the displacement of many people in the border towns between the two states.

Adeka said, “Currently, there are over 18,000 Internally Displaced Persons from various communities in the Awe and Keana local government areas who are in 11 camps in the state.”

He said security had been beefed up in the affected areas, adding that the government had set up mobile clinics in the IDPs camps.

Herdsmen’s attacks predate Buhari, Presidency says

The Presidency on Thursday insisted that it is unkind and incorrect to continue to blame Buhari for the recent violence unleashed on some states, including Benue, by suspected herdsmen.

The information was contained in a document titled, ‘Federal Response to the Attacks and Killings by Herdsmen in Benue and other States,’ made available by the Media Office of the Presidency.

The document read, “Insinuations and allegations that the attacks and killings are happening because President Buhari is Fulani are both unkind and incorrect.

“These attacks long predated the Buhari government. In 2013, no fewer than nine cases of herdsmen attacks were recorded in Benue State alone, with more than 190 people killed.

“In 2014, there were no fewer than 16 recorded attacks in Benue, which claimed more than 230 victims.

The media office explained that the historical context was important for a proper understanding of the issue, and to avoid unnecessarily politicising of what should be regarded and dealt with as acts of criminality.

“These attacks have been a longstanding issue, and successive governments have struggled to contain the situation.

“The Buhari administration is more than fully committed to bringing the cycle of violence to an end, prosecuting the attackers, and preventing further killings and attacks.

“The security agencies have standing instructions to arrest and prosecute any and all persons found with illegal arms,” the statement added.

According to the document, the recent killings in Benue and Taraba states have elicited many federal responses contrary to claims that nothing is being done.

It recalled that Buhari had met with the Benue State governor on the matter to assure him of the Federal Government’s commitment to protecting farmers and communities.

It added that the President had directed the Inspector-General of Police, Ibrahim Idris, to relocate to Benue State.

“On Monday January 8, 2018, the Minister of Interior, Abdulrahman Dambazau, convened a security meeting on the issue, bringing together federal and state government officials: Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, heads of security agencies, and the governors of the most affected states; Adamawa, Benue, Kaduna, Nasarawa, and Taraba.

“Since the first week of January, immediately following the January 1 attacks, the Inspector General of Police has deployed the following to the affected areas: 10 units of PMF, Police Special Forces, Counter Terrorism Units, conventional policemen, Police Explosive Ordinance Department, Special Police Joint Intelligence and Investigation Team and Police Aerial Surveillance Team (police helicopters).

“The Nigerian Army has deployed Special Forces to Benue, Taraba, and Nasarawa States.

“The Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development is working to establish cattle colonies across the country in 2018. These colonies will provide grass and water for the cattle, as well as education and health care facilities for herders. They will also have agro-rangers deployed to secure the facilities,” it added.

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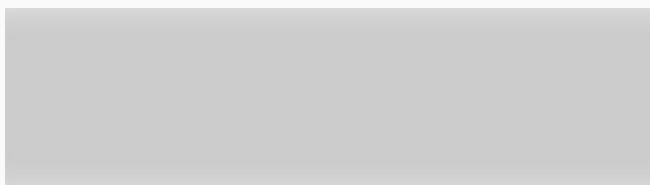
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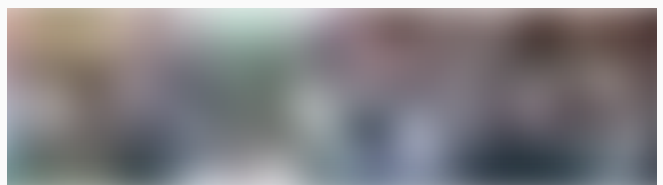
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