

Suspected herdsmen kill 16 in fresh Benue attack

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•File photo of a herder

John Charles, Makurdi

Sixteen people were killed in a fresh attack on three communities in the Gwer West Local Government Area of Benue State by suspected herdsmen.

The suspected herdsmen, who were said to have invaded the communities on Saturday, shot indiscriminately and killed 16 people.

The Chairman of Gwer West Local Government, Francis Ayagan, confirmed the attack.

He said, “Sixteen people were killed by militia herders in Tse Tuma, Chiachia and Tse Targu communities and neighbouring villages, all in Gwer West.”

Also confirming the attack, the sub-sector Commander of the Operation Whirl Stroke in charge of Gwer West, Flying Officer Mohammed Abubakar, said it was a reprisal for cows that were allegedly rustled on Friday by people he claimed were livestock guards in military uniform.

The sub-sector commander said seven corpses had so far been recovered from the affected communities.

Abubakar said the chairman of Gwer West Local Government Area of the state had given the names of seven members of livestock guards, who he alleged were the perpetrators of the violence to the OPWS.

Abubakar said, “At about 4.30 pm on Saturday, information got to me that some people in military uniform were sighted at the Agape Forest and I mobilised my men to the forest.

“My men embarked on a search and discovered that those behind the rustling of cows are members of the livestock guards.

“We later traced them to Ter Nagi’s Palace and discovered 22 cattle there but he (the monarch) claimed that they belonged to him.

“Thereafter, we contacted the DPO, who equally identified the rustlers as members of the Livestock Guards who disguised as military men to rustle cattle and butchered them for sale at the Naka Market.

“As I speak with you, they are selling the meat at the market. The DPO also gave the names of seven persons who are members of the Livestock Guards involved in the incident.

“Just this afternoon, our men went on a mop up patrol and discovered four additional dead bodies at the scene of the incident.”

The monarch of Naka, headquarters of Gwer West Local Government Area, Ter Nagi Chief Daniel Abomtse, said there was heavy attack in some communities in his domain.

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The monarch, who denied the claim that cows were found in his palace, alleged that four out of seven districts in his domain had been taken over by herdsmen. He appealed to the Federal Government to set up a military post at Agagbe to avert further attacks.

However, the Chief Press Secretary to Benue State Governor, Terver Akase, said it was wrong for the Operation Whirl Stroke to allege that members of the Livestock Guards were involved in the killing.

“This Operation Whirl Stroke comprises of professional soldiers who are expected to act professionally. They can’t rely on information from unverifiable source to come and say members of the Livestock Guards are instigating crisis. Members of the Livestock Guards are not armed, neither were they given military uniform by the Benue State Government. So the military should be objective and unbiased in their actions,” Akase said.

But the Force Commander of Operation Whirl Stroke, Maj. Gen. Adeyemi Yekini, who lamented the killings, noted that some unforeseen forces were deliberately trying to cause chaos in the state.