

Fulani gunmen killed my brothers, shot dad to take our land – Francis, Plateau farmer whose siblings were murdered

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Ngbra Zongo community in Bassa Local Government Area of Plateau State was recently attacked by bandits suspected to be Fulani herdsmen, killing four people and injuring many others. Two of those killed – Joseph and Ishaku Clement – were brothers of a farmer, Francis Clement, 30. Francis tells JAMES ABRAHAM how his brothers were killed by the assailants

Your area has been under attacks by bandits, what has been your experience?

The attacks in the community have really been traumatic for the people. It appears that as we try to get over the previous attacks and killings, the gunmen strike again with even deadlier attacks. They kill people, burn houses and destroy farms. This has been our experience for many years and we are not afraid to identify our Fulani neighbours as the perpetrators of these atrocities against our people.

How many people (relations and friends) have you lost in the crisis?

I don't know the number of people they have killed so far in the community in this manner but what I can tell you is that they are many. Just about two weeks ago, the attackers in their usual manner, raided our community and killed people, including two of my brothers. Two other family members – my younger brother and father – were also injured during the attack.

My elder brother – Joseph Clement – was killed. My younger brother, Ishaku Clement, was also killed. Joseph was over 40 years old while Ishaku was 13 years old.

How were your brothers killed?

The attack was carried out in the night. The gunmen were many; they arrived in the community between 1am and 2am and started shooting. At that time, my father went outside to urinate and he saw some people moving around in the community. Unknown to him, his house had been surrounded by the gunmen. When he approached them to find out who they were, one of them brought out a gun and shot him in the leg.

It was then that he knew the community was in danger. My late brothers were sleeping in the room and they were woken up by the gunshot. When they went outside and tried to escape from the house, the gunmen shot them dead.

How did your father escape?

I think it was God that saved his life because he ought to have been killed by the gunmen. A pastor and some other people were also killed the day my two brothers were killed. I will say that it was the pastor that saved my father's life because when they first shot at my father, he went down. By then, many people who had been woken up by the gunshot were trying to escape in different directions. Then the Fulani gunman, who shot my father, saw the pastor trying to leave one of the houses, he moved in his direction and shot the cleric dead. My father, who was already in pain, used the opportunity to hide from the gunman before he returned; this was how my father was able to escape.

Where were you when the attack was carried out?

I wasn't at our family house during the attack on Ngbra Zongo community. I was at a neighbouring village in Oureedam. You know, I'm a farmer.

How did you hear about it?

It was my younger brother that told me about the attack and the killing of two of our brothers. He was at home during the attack. He was staying with the slain pastor. He told me that they had gone for security patrol because he is a member of a vigilance group in the community. He said they were resting somewhere at the time because it had rained.

It was while they were resting that the gunmen came and started shooting at people in the community. He managed to also escape. He immediately called me to narrate the incident and before I could rush down to our family house, the Fulani gunmen had already left, leaving dead bodies and injured persons behind.

What were your brothers' dreams and ambitions?

Before their death, the younger one was a pupil and I am sure he hoped to contribute positively to the growth and development of society after his education. Joseph (the late elder brother) was a farmer like me. He has a daughter schooling in Jos, whom he had vowed to sponsor her education to the highest level. That was his focus while he was alive and now that he is dead, I don't know how that would be achieved.

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What is the condition of your father and brother who were injured?

My father is still in the hospital but my injured brother, Jessy, has been discharged. The hospital wants us to pay my dad's medical bill before he will be discharged.

How much?

The doctor said his medical bill is N200,000. The bullet damaged his leg. Though he has not fully recovered, he can walk now. But we don't have that kind of money to pay them; we have been running around to see how much we can raise and give to the hospital.

What were the last conversations you had with your late brothers?

The last time I saw them was in March when I went for our family meeting at Ngbra Zongo.

How did you feel when you heard that your brothers were dead?

I was devastated by the news. It was difficult to believe it and that was why I rushed down to the family house to see things for by myself immediately I was told. Lo and behold, it was true; I saw the two of them lying motionless on the ground with bloodstains all over their bodies. What would I do? I just left everything in the hands of God because their lives were already lost. It is only God that can help us because we don't have anybody that will stand for us and stop the killing of our people.

Have the police being involved?

When these attacks started, our leaders informed the state government and it responded by deploying soldiers in the community. They were stationed at various checkpoints. The attacks ceased during that period. Then all of a sudden, the soldiers were withdrawn from their duty posts and the Fulani gunmen immediately returned to the community to continue to kill people.

The most surprising thing is that when you try to call the security operatives to inform them that an attack is going on in the community, you won't see them until the gunmen have killed people and left. So, we are not satisfied with the way security agencies are handling the matter.

Why do you think your community is being attacked by the gunmen?

I don't really know; the gunmen just storm the community and start killing people without any provocation leading to the attack. I will say their target is for us to surrender our ancestral land to them. If not, why are they killing people who did not offend them in any way?

Who are the people behind these attacks and killings?

Fulani people are responsible for the attacks. It is not an allegation but a fact because we have seen them on many occasions during these attacks, killing and setting houses belonging to natives on fire.

How long have these killings and atrocities been going on?

For over 20 years. I don't know why nothing has been about it.

What fondest memories do you have of your late brothers?

They loved peace. They never had problem with anybody. When I think of how they were good to everyone they came in contact with, I wonder how the gunmen could kill them for no reason.

What do you think is the solution to these atrocities?

The solution lies with the government. Those perpetrating this evil are not stronger than the government. I believe that if the governor (Simon Lalong) can stand firm and insist that enough is enough, the killings in our community and other parts of the state will stop.

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Contact: theeditor@punchng.com