

Anger spreads as UN says 110 Borno farmers killed

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Farmers killed on Saturday by Boko Haram insurgents on their farms at Kwashebe Village of the Zambarmari area of Borno State...on Sunday. Photos: Gogara Bitrus, Borno State Govt and Borno Community Watch

Eniola Akinkuotu, Sunday Aborisade, Friday Olokor, Adelani Adepegba, Leke Baiyewu, Kayode Idowu, Dogara Bitrus and Tunde Oyekola

Saturday's killing of rice farmers at Kwashebe by Boko Haram insurgents in the Jere Local Government Area of Borno State attracted strong condemnations from eminent Nigerians and groups on Sunday.

The AFP had on Saturday reported that the insurgents attacked Kwashebe and killed no fewer than 43 rice farmers.

The terrorists were reported to have tied up the farmers, who were working on rice fields, before slitting their throats.

Although a member of the state Civilian Joint Task Force, Babakura Kolo, who assisted some of the survivors, put the number of people killed at 43, the United Nations on Sunday said 110 rice farmers lost their lives during the attack.

Groups and individuals, including All Farmers' Association of Nigeria; the President of the Senate, Dr Ahmed Lawan; the Speaker of the House of Representatives, Femi Gbajabiamila and the Coalition of Northern Groups, lamented that the attack would affect food security in the country.

On Sunday, the UN shed more light on the attack, contrary to earlier reports, it said 110 civilians were killed by Boko Haram.

The UN Humanitarian Coordinator in Nigeria, Mr Edward Kallon, who disclosed this, also said, many other persons were injured in the deadly attack by the terrorist group.

Also, the Amnesty International in a tweet on Sunday disclosed that 16 of the victims were internally displaced persons.

But Kallon, in a statement on Sunday, titled, 'Statement on attack against civilians in Koshobe, Borno,' stated, "I am outraged and horrified by the gruesome attack against civilians carried out by non-state armed groups in villages near Borno State capital Maiduguri. At least 110 civilians were ruthlessly killed and many others were wounded in this attack."

He disclosed that the afternoon attack was carried out by armed men on motorcycles, who murdered men and women, who were harvesting their fields in Kwashebe and other rural communities in the Jere Local Government Area.

Kallon, while condoling with the government and people of Nigeria, also said many women might have been kidnapped during the attack.

He noted, “We have also received reports that several women may have been kidnapped. I call for their immediate release and return to safety. My thoughts are also with the rural communities in the area, who are shocked by the brutality of yesterday’s (Saturday’s) attack and fear for their safety.”

“The entire UN system and the humanitarian community working to provide life-saving and development assistance to the most vulnerable in Borno State are outraged by the incident. Such direct attacks against innocent civilians jeopardize the ability for the most vulnerable people to survive the adversity they are facing, and which we are striving to alleviate.”

The UN described the incident as “the most violent direct attack against innocent civilians this year,” and called for the perpetrators to be brought to justice.

“It is, unfortunately, one of too many such attacks targeting farmers, fishermen and families who are trying to recover some livelihood opportunities after over a decade of conflict. I strongly condemn this attack and any act of violence against innocent civilians and I firmly urge all actors on the ground to respect international laws and humanity,” the UN official stressed.

The global organisation observed that rural communities in Borno State were facing untold hardships, adding that helping them to farm land and rebuild livelihoods were amongst the UN priorities and the only way to avoid the looming food crisis in the state.

It said civilians needed to be protected and spared from any kind of violence.

The statement read, “Innocent women, children and men desperately need food and other support and assistance, particularly at a time when we are recording some of the

highest levels of food insecurity in Borno State. We owe to do our utmost to help them survive these difficult times.”

10 women still missing

Meanwhile, the Amnesty International has said that 10 women working in the rice farms where Boko Haram slaughtered 110 persons are still missing.

The organisation in a tweet on Sunday stated that 16 out of the victims were IDPs.

It read, “Boko Haram and other armed groups must renounce their unlawful and vicious campaign of violence against civilians. The Nigerian authorities, for their part, must do more to protect civilians and bring the perpetrators of all such attacks to justice.

“Amnesty International’s findings show that, of the 43 farmers slaughtered by Boko Haram yesterday, 16 were Internally Displaced Persons resident at Farm Centre IDP Camp while 10 women working in Kwashebe rice farm are still missing after the attack.”

A resident, Hassan Mohammed, in an interview with one of our correspondents, said insurgents met the farmers at their rice fields and gathered them at Kwashebe, a village four kilometres from Zabarmari. He said the insurgents shot some of them and slaughtered others.

Another resident, Labbo Tahiru disclosed to *The PUNCH* that almost all the people in Zabarmari, Kaddamari and surrounding villages were rice farmers.

He said, “We are rice farmers in this locality. We have not had this tragic experience before, although we have had some encounters with these insurgents.”

According to him, before the attack, there were intelligence reports indicating the terrorists were planning the attack, but soldiers only embarked on their regular patrol in the area.

Terrorists came to kill innocent people after soldiers left – Resident

“Soldiers went round the area to patrol in their vehicles. It was after they had left that the terrorists attacked the innocent farmers.”

On Sunday, the murdered farmers were given a mass burial at Zabarmari, 20 kilometres from Maiduguri.

The burial was attended by the Borno state Governor, Prof. Babagana Zulum.

In his address after the burial, Zulum said the security situation in the communities must improve.

He stated, “We shall recruit more of our youths into the volunteer services and mobilise them to take the fight to the terrorists especially around Zabarmari axis so that the entire population of this locality can be secured.

Zulum, who said more than 43 people must have been killed, stated, “This is very sad. We are still appealing to the Federal Government to ensure recruitment of more of our youths into the CJTF (civilian joint task force) and hunters into the Nigerian military so that they can form part of the agro-rangers that will protect farmers.”

B’Haram still strong in many parts of Borno – gov

He also admitted that “Boko Haram sect is still existing strongly in many parts of our state.”

He noted that the dreaded sect still occupied the Sambisa forest and the Lake Chad regions in northern Borno.

Meanwhile, there was outrage over the attack on Sunday with the President of the Senate, in a statement by his media aide, Ola Awoniyi, describing it as another barbaric act against innocent Nigerians.

The statement was titled, ‘Senate President condemns killing of farmers in Borno.’

He said, “This heinous crime is particularly sad given the ongoing spirited efforts by the Federal Government at ensuring food security in Nigeria through the many programmes that have been put in place to support the agriculture sector.

“This incident is heart-rending and again demonstrates why we must all continue to support the security forces to thwart the criminals in their evil determination to impose a reign of terror on the North -East of Nigeria.”

Gbajabiamila, on his part, expressed sadness over the killing of the farmers and said the incident had once again brought to the fore the need for more military actions against the terrorists.

This was contained in a statement issued on Sunday by the Special Adviser to the Speaker on Media and Publicity, Lanre Lasisi.

The statement was titled, ‘Gbajabiamila condemns killing of Borno rice farmers, calls for more military action against insurgents.’

The Speaker said it was unfortunate that farmers were killed “in a most gruesome manner” at a time the country was focusing on self-sufficiency in rice production

Rise, protect yourselves, CNG tells Northerners

The CNG called on northerners to “rise and protect themselves” from all forms of banditry and insurgency afflicting the region.

The organisation said that the regime of the President, Major General Muhammadu Buhari (retd), had lost control over “the imperatives of protecting northerners.”

The CNG, in a statement by its Spokesperson, Abdul-Azeez Suleiman, titled, ‘Borno killings: Time for citizen action’, said, “Time has come for citizens to rise and protect themselves. The situation under which all northern communities live today is no longer tolerable and we must all rise to protect ourselves and demand an immediate and comprehensive overhaul of the leadership of the nation’s military and the entire security and law and order assets.

“The President and federal troops keep telling us that they are doing something about the mounting insecurity; but by now, all northerners must have realized that our region has been abandoned at the mercy of a rampaging insurgency that is continuously wasting the greatest asset of North, its population and weakening it politically and pauperizing it.”

The Managing Director of Wal-Wanne Group, Abiso Kabi, in a statement on Sunday, said the sad incident would not only cause instability in the zone, but would also lead to poverty and make the people to depend on aid.

Kabi said the Koila Agro Allied Nigeria Limited was the most affected company, as it lost many of its farmers to the attack.

He called on the Federal Government to recruit more persons into the civilian joint task force to boost security in the state.

The Convener, Coalition in Defence of Nigerian Democracy and Constitution, Ariyo-Dare Atoye, in an interview with *The PUNCH* admonished Nigerians to unite and be resolute in demanding the overhaul of the nation's security architecture.

He said Buhari should either sack the service chiefs or tender his resignation letter, noting that Nigerians had lost confidence in them and by extension, in the Buhari regime.

Farmers now scared to go to farms – All Farmers' Association of Nigeria

The President of the All Farmers Association of Nigeria, Kabir Ibrahim, in an interview with *The PUNCH*, said the killing of the farmers was devastating.

He stated, "Our farmers are indeed scared to go to their farms following these incessant killings. Worse still the country's food system will be adversely affected further following the COVID-19 pandemic and flooding.

"This killing actually portends serious hunger challenges in this region and also larger society."

A former President, Committee For the Defence of Human Rights, Malachy Ugwummadu, on his part said the killing was a sad commentary on the worsening security situation in Nigeria.

The Kwara State Governor AbdulRahman AbdulRazaq, commiserated with Zulum.

The governor, in a statement by his Chief Press Secretary, Rauf Ajakaye, said, “Governor AbdulRahman AbdulRazaq sends his heartfelt condolences to the government and people of Borno State over the unfortunate incident, and prays the Almighty Allah to repose the souls of the victims who got killed while lawfully fending for themselves and their families.”

Government needs to do more to protect citizens – NHRC

Reacting to the attack, the Executive Secretary of National Human Rights Commission, Tony Ojukwu, said the Federal Government should adopt a policy for the protection of civilians in Nigeria.

The President, Arewa Christians and Indigenous Pastors Association, Luka Shehu, in a chat with *The PUNCH*, said the killing had exposed the inherent weaknesses of the present regime in Nigeria.

He said, “The incessant activities and attacks by terrorists in Borno State in particular further expose the inherent weaknesses and failure of the Buhari administration as far as security is concerned in the North-East, North-West and the central region of Nigeria as a whole.”

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