

My world crashed when I saw how invaders hacked my son to death — Mum of farmer lost to Gombe mayhem

• Life now empty, no food, shelter, security, say grieving families

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A It is not well with 65-year-old woman, **Baite Yakubu**, whose son, **Masi**, was hacked to death during the recent communal clashes in Nyurwar, Hemen in Jessu ward, Balanga Local Government Area of Gombe State.

Yakubu said, "Masi was a 40-year-old farmer. He was sleeping at home when I heard that the attackers were approaching our destination. I called him thrice to run, that there was violence but he didn't listen to me. That was the last time I was able to speak to him. Having called him repeatedly, I thought he had escaped somewhere so I fled our home. If I knew that things would end this way, I would have gone inside the room to drag him out to run away with me. I shouldn't have listened to his response that he was coming. He was murdered inside the room. If the assailants didn't meet him at home, the story would have been different."

"I was surprised to discover his dismembered body. They cut off his head, legs, hands as well as intestines before setting the house ablaze. My world has crashed. I have lost my appetite for food. I have also lost interest in many things as I can't explain this sudden tragedy."

Yakubu added that it was unfortunate that people would unleash mayhem on fellow human beings and cause them so much pain and tears.

She stated, "By killing our loved ones, our world has assumed a pitiable state. I feel dizzy most of the time now. The attackers besieged our homes and chased us away. They packed our food and torched our homes. We have nothing to return to. We have no place to stay. We are left with no food, children and home."

Waja and Lunguda communities in the border areas of Gombe and Adamawa are neighbours with a history of communal clashes. Overtime, the two communities intermarry to solidify their relationship. The affected communities involves Nyurwar, Hemen in Jessu ward all predominantly Lunguda by tribe. On Tuesday, property worth millions of naira were burnt and 15 dead bodies recovered in Nyurwar, Hemen in Jessu ward, Balanga Local Government Area of Gombe State. However, the state Commissioner for Information, Julius Ishaya, on Wednesday, said Tuesday's killings had no traces of the infamous Lunguda/Waja hostility.

"I am 40 years old now and have never seen this type of dastardly act. Imagine beheading someone and chopping off people's hands, legs and going away with the body parts," said a farmer, **Mispara Sani**, who also lost a younger brother, **Tandu Sani**, to the bedlam.

Clothed in grief, **Mispara** said that life had never been so tough, adding that his brother had a promising future.

Mispara said, "My world has been disrupted. **Tandu** was a 38-year-old graduate of Banchi State Polytechnic where he earned a Higher National Diploma in Tourism. He was with N-Power and later went into farming. He took farming seriously. In our last discussion, **Tandu** asked me how we could build our family and I told him that we had to rededicate our lives to God, trust in Him to provide for us. I also urged him to take things easy. He was married to a Waja woman with two kids but the marriage had some challenges. There is nothing more to add than to say that this is terrible. I have never experienced what happened in Gombe that a fellow man will cut the hands, legs, head and intestines of another fellow man. How can I explain the grief of our family at this time?"

He appealed to the government to come to the aid of the residents to tackle security challenges in the state while urging the relevant authorities to provide youths with employment.

He added, "Government must realise that young people are suffering. The violence could have been averted. The young ones are unemployed, they have nothing to do. Many of them have basic knowledge but are not gainfully



• One of the affected areas



• Haugira



• Isuwa



• Malsanda



• Sani

employed. There is a need for reconsideration by relevant authorities on how we can build our nation. Government should invite the elders of Waja and Lunguda people to explain the cause of this violence to nip it in the bud. Some persons mobilised others to burn houses. It's not a good thing that some people are enjoying and others are suffering in Nigeria."

The government has imposed a 6pm to 8am curfew to restore normalcy. Our correspondent on Thursday arrived in Lutheran Church where 50-year-old **Sambi Haugira** resides as an Internally Displaced Person with others after residents abandoned their communities. He lost his 70-year-old father to the clash. The atmosphere of the ones bubbling town was mournful.

He said, "As you can see my world will never remain the same. It's now empty. It is too pathetic and I lack words to express my grief. The only thing I could retrieve from the house is his identity card. We don't stay together so the last time I visited my father, I didn't see him. I went there to greet him. We had a good relationship. No amount of effort can bring my father back. We had buried him. I feel a vacuum within me which no one can fill it."

"The security men did not assist much in quelling the Waja mayhem. People's houses were burnt and the police couldn't do anything. From what I witnessed, this is not a religious conflict because those that unleashed mayhem are both Christians and Muslims."

For **Afodja Malsanda** who lost her uncle and

family houses to the incident, he has become helpless with life.

He said, "My uncle, **Naphthali**, was like a pillar to our family. This is indeed a huge loss. I am in my mid-50s. My uncle was one of the elders in the community in Nyurwar. We came home for vacation and had spent about three nights in Nyurwar. We later went to Cham and the night we came to Cham everything was peaceful. I didn't see my uncle when I came as I usually did. On Monday night around 1am, my brother woke me up. He told me that there was fire, and that the local community, **Sokko**, was on fire. He said the women and children gathered in churches to hide. He said he didn't know when help would come and that I should call anyone I knew who could be of help. We tried calling the people we knew but we didn't get any response."

Malsanda added that survivors were scattered across Yola, adding that most of the victims escaped with nothing.

"Many people escaped through nearby villages with the clothes they had on. With the current situation, we don't know when the people can return to their homeland because houses were torched and no sign of help. All we want is peace for people to return to their ancestral homes and to their farms peacefully. People in the communities where the bedlam happened have lived together for years and intermarried. In my family, we have those who married from the other community and have children. Only the government can end this

ugly situation," she said.

According to 56-year-old **Masariya Isuwa**, her experience is not what anyone will desire to go through.

She added, "It's a few months after the demise of my husband that my son was killed in a terrible way. It is too painful to bear and the world is on hold. We feel to a church for safety when we heard that the crisis was spreading to where we lived. My son didn't go anywhere and his stomach murdered him in his room. I need to stay in **Billiri** because of the recent crisis we celebrated only to be consumed by this bloody incident. I lost a husband and a son. I have been battling high blood pressure and diabetes. This is too much for me to bear. I feel my challenges are best imagined than experienced by anyone. Losing a husband and a son is gutting."

Appealing to the government for a quick end to the crisis, **Isuwa** said, "Right now, no food, house or security. I appeal to the government to look at this community with mercy and find a lasting resolution to this ugly attack. Sometimes we want to think the government doesn't really care about the suffering of dwellers in this community."

We'll punish those behind bedlam, says Yahaya

The state governor, **Muhammadu Yahaya**, on Tuesday, visited the Nyurwar, Hemen (Jessu) communities where he promised the victims of government immediate support.

He appealed to community leaders and youths of the affected communities to embrace peace, assuring them that the government would send palliatives to them.

Yahaya said, "You can see the level of damage. Lives have been lost in Hemen and seven died, and in Nyurwar, eight people died making 15 people and property destroyed. We have seen the level of destruction and we are unhappy about this development. We are going to follow it up to ensure that it doesn't happen again. We will ensure that those who committed this crime are brought to justice."

Similarly, after Wednesday's Executive Council meeting, the state government said the incident was not caused by the age-old Waja/Lunguda dispute. Speaking on behalf of the government, **Ishaya**, said, "Council today deliberated extensively on the ugly development that occurred in Nyurwar, Jessu and Hemen area of Balanga Local Government. It was a communal clash. It was not the Lunguda/Waja people."

We rose to the occasion — Police

The state Commissioner of Police, **Ishola Babatunji**, said that the police didn't compromise in arresting the situation, stating that they worked to protect lives and property as the crisis escalated. He noted that the command swung into action immediately it learnt of the crisis.

He said, "I had to mobilise men from the various squadrons 34 & 39 and some other tactical teams to come with their men. So with the help of security agencies, the place has been fortified to ensure that peace returns. The curfew lasts between 6pm and 8am and our men are there to enforce it."