

news

Killing fields: Ebonyi herdsman killings rise to 52, Niger bandits kill 16

Sunday Aborisade, Leke Baiyewu, Godwin Isenyo, Raphael Ede, Chidiebere Okeoma and James Abraham

THE pan-northern socio-political organisation, Arewa Consultative Forum, on Monday said South-East leaders had left their responsibilities for a separatist group, the Indigenous People of Biafra.

The ACF National Publicity Secretary, Mr Emmanuel Yawe, stated this in an interview with *The PUNCH*, as the number of those who died during herdsman attacks on three Ebonyi communities rose to 52 on Monday.

The ACF in a statement by its Chairman, Chief Audu Ogbu, issued a travel advisory to northerners planning to visit the South-East. It said except such trips were matters of life and death, they should be shelved.

The spate of violence in the South-East continued with 11 people killed in fresh attacks during IPOB's stay-at-home.

In Enugu State, a former High Court judge, Justice Stanley Nnaji, was shot dead along Ebeano Tunnel, Enugu on Sunday evening.

Also, one of our correspondents on Monday learnt that the corpse of the Chief Provost of Nigeria Immigration Service, Imo State Command, Okiemute Mrere, who was assassinated on Saturday, was discovered in a bush on Sunday morning.

Between 2am and 3am on Monday, Goodview Hotel at the Nekede axis of Owerri, Imo State, was burnt.

In the afternoon, gunmen burnt the Amandugba Divisional Police Headquarters in the Isu Local Government Area of the state.

Also on Monday, four policemen were killed in various parts of Enugu. Sources told one of our correspondents that one policeman was killed in Uwani in Enugu South, two at Mgbeme area of Coal Camp, and another one killed along Okpara Avenue opposite Central Bank of Nigeria all in the Enugu North.

In Ebonyi State, a policeman and four Biafran agitators, were killed at Nnodo area of the state during IPOB's stay-at-home.

Expressing concern about the killings, the ACF spokesman, Yawe, said the South-East leaders should live up to their responsibilities.

In the interview with *The PUNCH*, he said the association was against any form of retaliating

the killing of Gulak.

He stated that the forum was only concerned about how South-East leaders had abdicated their responsibilities to IPOB.

Yawe said, "We are against retaliation because it didn't help matters and never helped matters in the past. We are only concerned that the leaders of South-East have abdicated responsibility and left their fate in the hands of IPOB and the Eastern Security Network who have little knowledge of the history of their people."

Also the ACF Chairman, Ogbu, warned against the killing of northerners resident and or visiting in the South, particularly South-East.

ACF warns northerners, Wike attacks Uzodimma

He gave the warning in a statement titled, 'ACF warns over attacks, killing of northerners,' and released by the National Publicity Secretary of the forum.

The statement read, "The ACF has noticed of late with increasing concern the attacks on/killing of northerners resident and or visiting the South, particularly the South-East. It was so bad at a point in February this year that the northern traders who normally supply the food needs of the south, the Amalgamated Union Food and Cattle Distributors of Nigeria, embarked on a strike action to make the point that their lives also mattered. The ACF was among those who put pressure, on, and ultimately convinced, the AUFCDN to call off the strike. The ACF did that in the spirit of one Nigeria."

"Yesterday, Sunday 30th May, 2021, one of leaders in the north was brutally murdered on the streets of Owerri Imo State by gunmen, most likely of IPOB and Eastern Security Network, who have been waging a public campaign of killings and other forms of brutalities, to realise their dream country of Biafra."

"The Arewa Consultative Forum, hereby issues a very strong advisory to all northerners who may wish to travel to the South-East; northerners to weigh the importance and necessity of such travels. Unless such trips are absolutely necessary and of compelling nature, like matters of life and death, they should not be made. And where the trip must be undertaken, the traveller should take every security precaution in his or her movements while there, including linking with the security

agencies at the place or places to be visited."

"The need to issue this travel advisory has become necessary against the backdrop of history, wherein events such the killings of northern leaders in 1966 triggered the events that led to a civil war that cost the country thousands of lives, and an untold sufferings to millions of innocent people. To be forewarned is to be forearmed, and a stitch in time saves nine!"

"The Arewa Consultative Forum also wishes to call, with the strongest voice, on the security agencies to do everything possible to apprehend those who assassinated Ahmed Gulak in cold blood and bring them to justice. The lives of northerners, and indeed of all Nigerians matter."

"Unfortunately in the midst of this serious national crisis it would appear that the entire narrative from the South East has been taken over by IPOB and so-called unknown gunmen to the exclusion of established leaders. This is worrisome."

As the ACF issued the travel advisory, there was tension in Jos, the Plateau State capital on Monday, as Igbo traders, who had earlier opened their shops at Terminus Market shut them because of fear of attacks by northern youths.

A detachment of policemen took over the market following palpable tension that enveloped the area and the adjoining streets.

When one of our correspondents visited the market at 5pm, it was observed that most shops belonging to the Igbo were closed while those owned by northerners continued with their businesses.

Initially, it was thought that the Igbo were observing the sit-at-home order by IPOB in solidarity with their counterparts in the South-East, but a trader said if they were doing that they should have started in the morning.

We closed shops when Hausa youths were brandishing cutlasses - Igbo trader

One of the traders, Ogechi Chukwuma who returned home after locking her shop blamed the tension on some Hausa whom she accused of planning to attack the market with weapons

She said "Today, the situation in Jos market has nothing to do with IPOB. We came to the market and opened our shops for business as usual. But around 1pm, some Hausa boys were seen brandishing some cutlasses and

other dangerous weapons and information quickly circulated round the market that they were planning to attack the Igbo over the killing of a former presidential aide, Ahmed Gulak in Imo State.

"So, that caused the tension as the Igbo and non-Hausa traders started closing their shops to avoid being caught in the alleged planned attack"

But the Chairman of the Disciplinary Committee in the market, Alhaji Alli Karami, denied that the Hausa were planning to attack the Igbo in the market.

He added that it was not unusual for rumour mongers to capitalise on unfortunate occurrences to cause tension, and that was the case in Jos.

Karami said, "We were surprised to see the Igbo locking their shops in the market. When we inquired to know the reason for their action, nobody told us anything. But if the reason is based on rumoured planned attack on them by the Hausa, then I can tell you that it is not true because there was no such plan by the Hausa to attack anyone in the market. You can see that we did not close our shops"

The Spokesman for the state Police Command, Ubah Ogaba said, "Our men were deployed in the market to maintain law and order. The area is calm now."

The Imo State Governor, Hope Uzodimma, at a press conference in Owerri, on Monday said Gulak's killing had a political undertone.

He stated, "Alhaji Ahmed Gulak was in Imo State for a national assignment. He came to Owerri with the Senate Committee on Constitutional Amendment. Being a humble man, he chose to travel incognito according to his friend who was with him. Someone must have trailed him from the hotel to the airport. That is exactly why his gruesome murder appears to be a clear case of political assassination."

But his Rivers State counterpart, Nyesom Wike in an interview on *Politics Today*, a current affairs programme on *Channels Television* on Monday evening faulted Uzodimma's claim.

He stated, "I think that the Governor of Imo State, my brother, Hope Uzodimma, should allow the security agencies to do their proper investigation. It is too earlier now for him to come out to say it was a political assassination."

The Deputy Senate President, Ovie Omo-Agege, said the former presidential aide was on a national assignment when he was

murdered on Sunday morning.

Omo-Agege, who is the Chairman, Senate ad hoc Committee on Constitution Review, stated this in a statement issued by his Special Adviser on Media, Yomi Odunuga.

The deputy Senate President explained that Gulak was one of the consultants to the Senate Constitution Committee on Constitution Review.

The President of the Senate, Ahmad Lawan, condemned the gruesome murder of Gulak. Lawan, in a statement on Monday by his Special Adviser on Media and Publicity, Mr Ola Awoniyi, described the dastardly act as one crime too many.

Igbo custom places premium on a visitor - Ohanaeze

Also, the apex Igbo socio-cultural organisation, Ohanaeze Ndigbo, condemned the assassination of Gulak.

A statement on Monday by Ohanaeze spokesman, Chief Alex Ogonnia, described his murder as "a death too many because of the wrong signal it had sent to the general public".

Ogonnia stated that the Igbo custom places very high premium on the wellbeing and hospitality of a guest, adding, that the host would even pay the supreme prize in order to protect the life of a guest.

The statement partly read: "Ohanaeze Ndigbo led by Ambassador Professor George Obiozor expresses great concern over the recent developments in the South East of Nigeria; a zone noted for peace, tranquility, hard work and smooth economic activities."

The minority caucus in the House of Representatives said it was alarmed by the gruesome killing of Gulak.

The caucus, in a statement by the Minority Leader of the House, Ndudi Elumelu, described the assassination of Gulak as "wicked and barbaric", urging the police and other security agencies to fish out the assailants.

The representative of Kaduna Central Senatorial District in the 8th National Assembly, Senator Shehu Sani, appealed to youths in northern Nigeria against revenging the murder of the late APC chieftain.

Sani, in a statement on Monday morning, condemned the action of the gunmen and said it was an attempt to cause an inter-tribal conflict between the North and the South-East. "