

Years of bloodbath continue in Zamfara as bandits kill 49

GBENGA OLONINIRAN writes about the raging insecurity in Zamfara State where bandits' attacks send shivers to the towns and communities

TALES of sorrow, tears and deaths have continued in Zamfara State as bandits wreak havoc on communities, leaving homes and farmlands deserted over the years.

It appears no one is safe as the gun-wielding gang attacks working people, farmers, women and even children.

No fewer than 49 persons were reportedly killed by bandits during a five-day-long operation in the state last week.

The deceased, according to residents, were killed in five affected villages in the Anka Local Government Area of Zamfara State from Tuesday to Saturday.

Residents, who spoke with Daily Trust, detailed how 18 persons were killed in Farar-Kasa village, 22 in Dangdubi, two in Duhwa, four in Tatsomawa and three in Yar Sabaya villages respectively.

A resident of Anka town, who did not give his name for fear of being a target, said the bandits had been attacking communities in the local government since the beginning of the previous week.

The source said, "Banditry has become a daily affair in this part of Zamfara. To be honest with you, we are tired of this menace. The bandits are operating as if we do not have a government in this country. These people are almost everything in our communities; they are the police, the traditional rulers and the community leaders."

The resident added that the bandits could attack any community at will, "place levy on any community they so wish and abduct anybody in any community and nobody has the right to say no whatever directives they give."

Another source who craved anonymity for the sensitivity of the incident told the newspaper he narrowly escaped the bandits along Anka-Bagega road on Saturday. He said, "Two bandits in military uniform erected an illegal checkpoint along the road and were robbing road users."

A commercial driver, Mallam Muhammad, who also spoke, begged the federal and state governments to come to their aid by providing adequate security personnel to the area.

He noted that the inadequate presence of security officials was aiding the activities of the bandits in the Local Government Area.

When *The PUNCH* contacted the state Police Public Relations Officer, Zamfara State Command, ASP Yazid Abubakar, on Sunday, he promised to contact the Divisional Police Officer in charge of Anka Division for details and get back to our correspondent. "Let me confirm from the DPO. I will get back to you," he said. He was yet to do so as of the time of filing this report.

Meanwhile, the Zamfara State Government has insisted it will not bend to pressures to negotiate with bandits in the state.

The Commissioner for Information, Manir Haidara, who reiterated the government's stand, confirmed the kidnapping of farmers and the killing of a respected Islamic cleric to *The PUNCH* in a recent telephone interview.

His reaction came after some recent media reports indicated that bandits attacked two farming communities in the state - Maradun and Bil Bis in Tsafe LGA, where they allegedly kidnapped at least 30 farmers and killed the highly respected Islamic cleric on Thursday.

Haidara disclosed that efforts were already in place to rescue all the kidnapped victims.

The Islamic scholar, Mallam Makwashi Mai Jan Baki, along with one other person, were said to have been killed in Maradun town and two of the cleric's children were still reported to be missing after the attack.

"The Zamfara State Government cannot negotiate with bandits. What is between the state government and the bandits is an exchange of fire. Zamfara will never give room for negotiation with criminals terrorising our communities."

"We are doing our best to ensure we reduce their activities. This banditry thing started 13 years ago, but we're hopeful we'll curtail them," the information commissioner told *The PUNCH*.

Attacks by bandits in Zamfara communities have raged over the years, continually posing threats to communities and food security as farmers fear to go to farms.

In June 2019, bandits killed 34 people in the Tungar Kafau and Bidan Wawa villages of the Shinkafi LGA.

The bandits, who were on motorbikes, invaded the two villages around 5pm on the fateful day and shot at anyone they could see in the two villages. Several persons were also wounded. The police confirmed the attack and said normalcy was later restored.

In 2020, there were concerns in Zamfara about an amnesty the government granted bandits following the killing of 31 people in two separate attacks.



No fewer than 29 people were killed by the bandits at the Babban Kafi village in the Gummi LGA on the day of the attack in January. On the same day, the bandits killed two health workers at Makosa village in the Zumi Local Government Area of the state.

Nine people, including two policemen, were also killed by bandits in an attack in Zamfara in 2016, according to the police.

According to a Vanguard report, the then-police spokesman, Dan Awunah, said seven of the victims were members of the communities where the hoodlums attacked.

Bandits killed about 36 illegal gold miners in Bindim Village, in Maru Local Government Area of Zamfara State in 2016.

The attackers reportedly attacked and killed the miners in the night while they were prospecting for gold in the area.

In March 2018, more than 30 persons were buried in Anka LGA following an attack by bandits.

According to the News Agency of Nigeria, the bandits attacked the area after some members of the community held a meeting to discuss measures to be taken against the bandits during the 2018 farming season.

The bandits had earlier threatened that there would be no farming activities in the area in the year's rainy season.

In 2022, bandits killed tens of local vigilantes in the state after stealing cattle, two security sources and a local official told Reuters in June.

The sources said bandits rustled some cattle in the community of Gidan Dan Inna and villages around the town of Auki in the Bungundu LGA before being pursued by local vigilantes.

"The vigilantes didn't know that the bandits had laid an ambush for them. They opened fire on the vigilantes while riding into the bush on motorbikes, killing about 30 of the vigilantes," one of the sources said.

In one of the recent attacks in May 2024, bandits last Tuesday abducted a bank manager of TAJ Bank, Zamfara State branch, Mansur Kaura.

A resident of the area, Musa Ibrahim, said Kaura was kidnapped when the bandits invaded his residence at Rijiyar Gabas area in Gusau, Zamfara State capital, around 1am.

The bandits, according to a source close to the head of the community, Chief John Jatau, were demanding Ngoom ransom.

The Zamfara State Police Command on April 2, 2024, also said bandits attacked and killed a man identified as Ashiru Nagoma and abducted his wife and neighbour in Buluku, an outskirts of Gusau LGA.

The spokesperson for the command, ASP Yazid Abubakar, confirmed the attack.

Amid these attacks is a threat to food security. Agric experts said Nigeria had been facing a serious food crisis since the emergence of Boko Haram terrorists, herdsmen-farmers crisis and other forms of criminality, especially in the North where the majority of Nigeria's



staple foods were produced. They said the burning of arable farmlands and killing of farmers made the surviving ones abandon farming.

About 165 farmers were reportedly killed in March 2024, and 200 were displaced, forcing over 72,000 others to shun farming for fear of being attacked and killed by bandits, according to the Chairman of the Kaduna Chapter of the Association, Alhaji Mohammed Numbu.

According to him, farmers in Katsina and Zamfara states, out of fear, pay taxes to bandits before planting and while harvesting their produce to avoid having their months of sweat and tending to go up in flames.

On Sunday, a security expert, Nnamdi Anekwe, said it was important for the state government to tackle the source of the violence in the state.

Anekwe said, "The government has to identify the sources of the conflicts and develop the blueprint to tackle them. If you don't cut off the supplies and the movement of these bandits, you're not going to solve the problem. It's not a question of reacting or going in when they kidnap people, it's about cutting off the supply and stopping their movement. You need to be on a relentless pursuit against these bandits. If they move from one local government to another, you follow them. The government has to cut the supply of weapons to the bandits and stop their movements."

He suspected that illegal mining was a part of the roots of insecurity in the state.

He also lamented that an attack on farmers would affect food security. "It's a threat to food security. Shortage of food can lead to inflation and further riots. It's a source of conflict if farmers can't go to the farm," he added.

A retired Deputy Inspector-General of Police, Adedayo Adeoye, said the government must declare a state of emergency in Zamfara and other northern states.

In a telephone conversation with *The PUNCH* on Sunday, the ex-DIG said, "I've been asking the president to declare a state of emergency in those areas."

He said there was a security emergency in Zamfara and other areas. Adeoye said, "That's the only way to solve the problem there. This ad hoc fighting will not help the situation. They should declare an emergency and concentrate on Zamfara, Sokoto, Katsina."

He noted that insecurity had dropped in parts of Yobe and Borno because the government focused on the states.

"Just like the way they concentrated on Yobe and Borno states, you know the state of banditry and attack have reduced in those areas. It's the same thing I would love them to do. Let them concentrate on that. Declare a state of emergency and flood the place with security agencies such as the military, the police, the Civil Defence and the Department of State Security Services to get them intelligence," he added.

These people are almost everything in our communities; they are the police, the traditional rulers and the community leaders