

Mass burial in Taraba as herders slaughter scores

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File Photo: Herdsman

| Justin Tyopuusu, Imoleayo Oyedeyi, and Olufemi Adediran

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Tears flowed freely on Saturday as grieving residents of Munga Lalau and Munga Doso communities in Karim-Lamido Local Government Area of Taraba State buried scores of villagers killed by suspected herdsmen.

The communities were thrown into mourning after the assailants stormed the villages around 2am on Friday.

Eyewitnesses said the attackers, numbering over 50, invaded the villages on motorcycles and opened fire indiscriminately on sleeping residents.

“We have counted 42 bodies so far, with many still missing,” a soldier who participated in the rescue operation told Sunday PUNCH.

The Chairman of the Munga Youth Forum, Suleiman Joel, confirmed that many people were killed.

He said, “We are still recovering the dead bodies, but I can tell you that the casualty figure is high. These are not isolated killings. It is a calculated extermination. People who returned to their homes based on security assurances have now been killed. What do we tell their families?”

Residents, who spoke to *Sunday PUNCH*, said the attackers, armed with AK-47 rifles and machetes, moved from house to house, burning homes and killing anyone in sight.

“We didn’t know where to run to,” said Soja Emmanuel, a survivor. “They came around 2am, shooting sporadically. People jumped out of their homes into the bush. Some didn’t make it.”

Families express anger at burial

During the burial on Saturday, some of the victims’ families were filled with sorrow as they recounted the way their relatives were killed.

A community leader, who lost two of his brothers in the attack, Augustine Munga, called for swift government intervention to end the bloodshed and bring the perpetrators to justice.

“The mass burial took place here in Munga Lalau and was conducted by soldiers and other security personnel,” Munga added.

Another resident, who lost four relatives, suggested that the attackers were hired by herders to unleash mayhem on the communities.

“We all slept in the bush yesterday. The sound of gunshots that rent the air was beyond conventional herdsmen. We fled to the mountains and returned home this morning to see our houses razed,” he sobbed, struggling to utter words during a phone interview with one of our correspondents.

Madam Sarah Bitrus, who lost her husband and two other family members, could barely speak.

With tears running down her cheeks, she simply said, “My world has ended.”

Gov Kefas condemns attacks

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The state Governor, Agbu Kefas, condemned the attacks, describing them as “carnage, horrendous and unacceptable”.

He also vowed to bring the assailants to book.

Kefas, in a statement by his Special Adviser on Media and Digital Communications, Emmanuel Bello, said scores of residents were killed.

He reiterated his commitment to secure the state from external attacks and other forms of aggression.

The governor stressed the need for greater collaboration between the people and security forces, especially in the areas of vigilance and sensitive information sharing.

While appealing for calm, Kefas urged citizens to be conscious of their environment and report all suspicious movements to law enforcement agencies.

The acting Police Public Relations Officer in the state, James Lashen, said the attacks were carried out by suspected herdsmen.

He said, “Actually, there was an attack on Munga community by suspected herdsmen. Our men responded promptly, and during the engagement, the attackers fled, abandoning a motorcycle. We recovered four bodies at the scene. There were no casualties among our men.”

The killing surge

In recent years, the North has witnessed a troubling surge in violent attacks and killings driven largely by a mix of banditry, ethno-religious tensions, and farmer-herder conflicts.

However, the spate of terror escalated in the last few months with no fewer than 383 people killed across the region in just a month.

According to media reports, the most affected among the 19 Northern states are Plateau, Benue, Zamfara, Kaduna, Niger, Kano and Taraba.

The terror attacks have snowballed into mass killings, shattering many communities in the region and leaving hundreds dead.

One of the deadliest of these attacks occurred in Benue, where at least 56 people were killed by suspected herdsmen during coordinated assaults on Ukum and Logo areas of the state between April 17 and 18.

Also in April, 40 people were killed after armed men stormed Zike community in the Kwall district of Bassa Local Government Area of Plateau State.

Similarly, 57 people were killed in Borno State last Thursday by militants linked to Boko Haram’s Jama’atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda’awati wal-Jihad faction.

According to reports, eyewitnesses said the recovered corpses bore slit throats and bullet wounds, raising further concerns about the spate of killings in the region.