

Alia outraged as suspected herders kill cop, 41 Benue villagers

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| By John Charles

 Benue State Governor, Hyacinth Alia

Benue State Governor, Hyacinth Alia, has expressed deep outrage and sorrow over the killing of at least 42 people, including a mobile police officer, and the shooting of a Catholic priest by suspected armed herders in Gwer West Local Government Area of the state.

The governor, in a statement issued by his Chief Press Secretary, Kula Tersoo, strongly condemned the attacks, which occurred between Saturday and Sunday in four different communities.

The CPS quoted the governor as condemning “in strong terms the barbaric attacks on Tse-Orbiam and Ahume communities of Gwer-West LGA, where scores are feared killed.”

He expressed anger that the “the heinous acts, carried out just metres away from a military checkpoint, is a stark reminder of the pervasive violence and lawlessness that have plagued the dilapidated Makurdi-Naka road in recent times.”

“These barbaric criminals masquerading as herders, whose actions reveal a blatant disregard for human life and the sanctity of our communities; their cowardice in attacking innocent individuals, especially, our innocent natives, will not be tolerated,” Alia said,

The governor also condemned the shooting of Rev. Fr. Solomon Atongu along the Makurdi-Naka road on Saturday, reaffirming his administration’s commitment to the safety and security of the people of Benue State.

Residents said the coordinated attacks occurred in Tse-Ubiam, Tyolaha, Ahume, and Aondona communities. A local, Agatha, confirmed the Sunday attacks.

A local who spoke to journalists said, “The attack on Ahume and Aondona was on Sunday with over 10 people killed at Ahume and 20 killed in Aondona. The attacks happened between 4pm and 5pm.

“Among the deaths were children of less than two years old.”

Another local, Terseer, said the attacks on Saturday in Tyolaha and Tse-Ubiam claimed 12 lives.

“Tyolaha and Tse Ubiam communities were attacked on Saturday and five people were killed at Tyolaha and seven persons killed in Tse Ubiam.

“Ironically, the attack on Saturday happened nearby a military base located at Tse-Ubiam and Tyolaha communities.”

According to him, a search-and-rescue team set up by stakeholders in Nagi and the council had recovered 42 bodies as of early Monday.

“So far, 42 bodies have been recovered between Saturday and early hours of today, Monday,” Terseer stated.

Aondona, one of the worst-hit communities, is also the hometown of the Catholic Bishop of Makurdi Diocese, Most Rev. Wilfred Anagbe, and Mrs. Eunice Ortom, wife of the immediate past governor.

Speaking on the attacks, the Chairman of Gwer West LGA, Mr. Victor Omnin, described the situation as “genocide on my people.”

In an emotion-laden voice, he said: “Yes, it happened and is still happening. It’s a pathetic situation. As we speak, we are still recovering corpses and over 30 dead bodies have been recovered so far between Sunday and Monday.

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“On Saturday also, Tse-Ubiam was attacked. This is just beside the military checkpoint, just about three kilometres to Naka. I buried five people yesterday and five others were taken to the mortuary on Saturday. Now we are talking about 40 or more people. This is genocide.”

He accused the military of failing to act despite their proximity,

“The soldiers will tell you straight that they don’t have the mandate to act on this. They can only engage these people when they fire at them and they told me practically that even the governor does not have the powers to order them on this. It is only the President of the country and that is very clear.

“We are not saying that the military is incompetent. The soldiers are waiting for the orders and the mandate to do what they have to do, which have not been given.”

Omnin confirmed the death of a mobile police officer, Magaji, during the attack.

“This mobile man had dedicated his whole life to service. He was always at that junction along Naka road whether he had bullets or not.

“Yesterday (Sunday) when they came, they said he finished his ammunition and was shouting for people to leave and escape. Unfortunately, Magaji was killed yesterday. This is genocide.”

The Police Public Relations Officer for the Benue State Command, CSP Catherine Anene, confirmed that officers responded to the attack at Aondona and recovered three bodies.

“The police responded when the case of Aondona was reported, and three bodies were recovered. Investigation is ongoing,” she said.

Anene also disclosed that a police officer had been killed while defending one of the affected villages shortly before the attack in Gwer West Local Government Area.

“Also, a policeman died defending one of the villages just a few hours before this incident in Gwer-West Local Government Area,” she added.

Efforts to get a response from the military regarding the allegation by the council chairman—that soldiers were unable to act without superior orders—were unsuccessful.

The acting Assistant Director, Army Public Relations, Operation Whirl Stroke, Captain Lawal Osabo, did not answer calls or respond to text messages sent to his mobile phone as of the time of filing this report.

The latest killings underscore the deepening security crisis in Benue State, which has witnessed persistent herders’ attacks across its communities.

According to Omnin, Gwer West LGA is the worst-hit, with all 15 council wards experiencing repeated invasions.

Despite a 6:30 pm restriction on movement imposed by the council, the attacks have continued, including the shooting of Rev. Fr. Atongo on Saturday evening on the Makurdi-Naka road.