

Benue herders kill scores in two-day rampage

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| By John Charles

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Many residents have been feared killed in coordinated attacks on Yelwata and Daudu communities in the Guma Local Government Area of Benue State.

The Chief Press Secretary to the state governor, Kula Tersoo, said reports from security operatives indicated that 45 people were killed in the attacks which started on Friday night and continued to the early hours of Saturday.

He said, “Well the report we have from the police is that 45 people lost their lives in the attack on Yelwata.”

But Matthew Mnyan, a community leader in Yelwata and former aide to ex-governor Samuel Ortom, stated that 200 residents lost their lives, including five security officers.

Speaking in a telephone interview with journalists on Saturday, Mnyan identified the attackers to be armed herders who invaded the community around 11pm on Friday.

He said, “It was a coordinated attack; some Fulani terrorists came from the western part of the Yelwata and started shooting and by the time policemen and young people tried to engage them, another group came from the eastern part of the community. They overran those trying to resist them.

“They killed people; you know some people do sleep in their stalls. They poured petrol on their stalls in the market and burnt them.

“In those stalls, we had people who moved from places like Branch Udei and people displaced from nearby villages, who slept in the stalls because of the proximity to the police and soldiers there.

“As of now, from the names they are putting together, and families that were burnt and killed are running to over 200. They killed and burnt people in their houses. They will pour petrol and burn the whole place where people are sleeping.

“We have a family of 15, some families of 12, men with their two wives, children and every one of them were burnt. It is a terrible sight.”

Mnyan said the community was putting the names of victims together, noting that many were burnt beyond recognition.

According to him, out of the 46 residents rushed to a hospital, 20 died.

“This was an unprovoked attack. It was planned. For over one week, we received reports from Nasarawa State that the terrorists planned to attack Yelwata, Ukoho, Ortese, Yogbo and Daudu. So, they are moving to attack these places simultaneously.

“Fortunately that same yesterday (Friday), the ones at Daudu were dislodged while some security men, including soldiers, were killed,

“Women, children and toddlers were murdered in cold blood. Children had their necks slit and killed like animals.

“We had wanted to move all the corpses to the road, but I recalled that there was a time we did that and three persons were killed by security personnel,” he added.

A senior military officer confirmed to *Sunday PUNCH* that two soldiers and an official of the Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps lost their lives in the attack.

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“I don’t have the authority to talk about this but two soldiers and a civil defence officer lost their lives while a police officer is missing,” the military officer said.

Confirming the attack, the Benue State Police Public Relations Officer, DSP Udemé Edet, said some of the hoodlums were killed.

She said, “According to our information, it happened in the early hours of today (Saturday) when suspected bandits invaded Yelwata town.

“The police and tactical teams posted to the town and reinforcement responded swiftly to the attack and engaged the attackers in a fierce exchange and some of the attackers were killed in the process.

“But it’s with great sadness that we report that some individuals lost their lives and others sustained injuries.”

It will be recalled that hoodlums on Thursday attacked Mtswenem and Akondotyough Bawa communities in North Bank, Makurdi.

No fewer than 25 people were reported dead.

The Special Adviser to the state governor on internal security, Joe Har, confirmed both attacks but did not give a casualty figure.

He said, “I can’t give an exact account of it because I’m not there physically but I’m aware that this ugly thing happened yesterday in Yelwata and at the back of Daudu. They are two different attacks. I can’t say the exact number because I don’t have the details.”

I lost 23 relatives to attack, says ex-gov’s aide

Prince Aondona Isiaka, a former Senior Special Assistant on Local Government Administration to the immediate past governor of the state, Samuel Ortom, said he lost 23 family members to the Saturday attack.

Isiaka said among the victims were his uncle, whom he identified as Elder Amaki, and his 10 family members, and also a first cousin, identified as Victor Utim.

Speaking in an emotion laden voice, Isiaka said, “My mother is from Tse Tarbee in Yelwata town. The armed herders unleashed serious terror; as I am talking to you now, we have recovered 23 corpses from my mother’s side.

“Others are still missing; it is either they were burnt while asleep or ran out because my first cousin, Victor Utim, was burnt.

“I was told that at the time the invaders stormed the community, my cousin was with his friends in the house and they all ran away from the house, but they said he refused to come out; that was how he was burnt. We could only recognise him through his skull this morning.

“Among those killed was my maternal uncle called Elder Amaki; they killed him, his sons, wives, in-laws and grandchildren, 11 of them.”

Isiaka said the marauders invaded Yelwata in buses.