

# 35 feared killed as gunmen invade seven Benue communities

FROM ROSE EJEMBI  
MAKURDI

**No fewer than 35 people were yesterday feared killed in seven Agatu villages in Benue State in a fresh invasion by suspected heavily armed Fulani herdsmen.**

*Sunday Sun* gathered from sources from the affected villages that the latest offensive, which caught the villagers unawares left thousands trapped in the battle area as at 5pm yesterday.

The State Commissioner of Works and Transport, Mr. John Ngbede who is a native of Agatu had last Friday alerted to persistent invasion of Agatu villages by suspected Fulani herdsmen.

The commissioner had appealed to security agencies to rise up to their responsibility and secure Ag-

atu as reports reaching him revealed that gunmen were advancing to more communities in his locality.

Ngbede who spoke in a telephone chat yesterday confirmed the latest attack, which came barely 24 hours after he addressed newsmen, expressing worry that heavy fighting was still going on in the area.

"It is true that Agatu is boiling at the moment. As I speak to you right now, heavy fighting is going on in Agatu, just as houses were being set on fire and many are feared dead. I can't confirm the exact casualty figure right now," Ngbede said.

Also, member representing Agatu state constituency in the Benue State House of Assembly, Sule Audu who claimed that seven villages had been sacked with no fewer than 35 feared dead, listed the villages to include Ello, Okpagabi, Ogwule-Ankpa,

Ogbangede, Ekwo, Enogaje and Okpanchenyi.

Audu regretted that there were not enough security men on ground to stop the gunmen who had the upper hand and were progressing to neighbouring villages.

"As I speak to you, only few soldiers are on ground who don't even have mobility to march the strength of the invaders. The attackers are over 5,000 spread across all the communities and unleashing terror on my people without any security resistance.

"They are moving towards Oshugbudu now and I ask, what can less than 40 soldiers on ground do to stop armed invaders numbering up to 5,000?"

But in a swift reaction, the state Secretary of Miyette Allah Cattle Breeders Association of Nigeria (MACBAN), Garus Gololo dispelled claims that the attackers were Fulani herdsmen, stressing that since a

reconciliation committee was set up by the Ochi' Idoma to broker peace between the Fulanis and Agatu natives, there had never been a reason for them to fight again.

"I don't know which people are attacking the Agatu in recent times. We don't have any Fulani person currently residing in the area and as I have said earlier we need peace, so it couldn't have been my people."

When contacted, state Police Public Relations Officer (PPRO), Daniel Ezeala, a Deputy Superintendent of Police (DSP) confirmed the fighting but declined to give number of deaths so far.

"Five Agatu villages are currently under heavy attacks. We can't confirm exact number of casualty now. However, we are on top of the situation. We will contact you later," Ezeala said.