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FROM SEGUN OLATUNJI, ABEOKUTA

As the dry season sets in every year, fear usually creeps into the minds of the people resident in about 30 villages in Ketu, Yewa North Local Government Area of Ogun State.

During this period, venturing to work in the farm, for the people who are mostly farmers amounts to putting their lives in danger. Even for many parents and guardians in the area, allowing their children to go to school at this time of the year is like gambling with the lives of their wards.

The reason for their fears is the recur-

Enough is enough, cry Ogun communities under Fulani attacks

rent nocturnal and daytime attacks by marauding Fulani herdsmen who would not even bat an eyelid before snuffing life out of residents who dare to challenge them and their cattle for encroaching on and destroying farmlands in the area. For over 20 years, the Ketu people have lived with this recurring nightmare.

The herdsmen usually wander with their cattle from the North and some other West African countries into these border com-

munities seeking "greener pastures" for their cattle. Unless the state government, the police and other security agencies take urgent steps to checkmate them, there might soon be a repeat of the annual raping of women and gruesome killing of innocent indigenes by these itinerant marauders.

A coalition of socio-cultural groups from the area, including Ketu Advancement Front, Ketu South People's As-

sembly and Ketu Alliance alleged that no fewer than 21 innocent residents of the area have been allegedly killed by the Fulani herdsmen since 2000.

It is against this backdrop of palpable and real fears that the people recently protested the alleged non-implementation of the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signed almost a year ago between them, the government and the Fulani

Ogun communities resist Fulani attacks

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herdsmen in the state.

The people are not happy that the state government had yet to show seriousness in getting the MoU implemented even in the face of the imminent yearly attacks on their communities and kinsmen by the invading Fulani cattle herders. They are accusing the state government of foot-dragging on the pressing issue which borders on their lives and livelihood.

In a peaceful protest in Tata, Yewa North, the people called on Governor Ibikunle Amosun to urgently constitute the implementation committee as contained in the MoU signed on Tuesday, December 17, 2013. They also called on the governor to give the committee the necessary wherewithal to execute its functions.

Brandishing the gory pictures of some of their kinsmen allegedly slaughtered by the Fulani herdsmen, the coalition also alleged that the state government and the police even always took side with the cattle herders whenever the people of the area attempted to protect themselves against their onslaught.

A joint statement signed by Messrs Ranti Ogunsola for Ketu Alliance, Kunle Abiose for KAF and Lasisi Jelili for Peoples Assembly: "We regret to note that since the signing of an MoU midwife by the state government, the same government has gone to sleep over the issue while the herdsmen continue to kill and maim our people."

Ogunsola said: "We recall that while the MoU was being signed on December 17, 2013, the herdsmen were on killing expedition in Ketu. We drew government attention to this and requested the herdsmen's exit before signing the document to allow for the control of their arms, but government felt otherwise. We reluctantly signed the document hoping that the implementation committee jointly agreed upon would be swiftly put in place and empowered to work."

"We have cried loud that on that December 17, 2013, four Ketu people were

shot by the herdsmen. Out of the four, one Alade Eyo died on the spot while one Bondu Oladeyo died the following day.

This was beside the five-year old Ajimoh Adisa, who was gruesomely murdered on her father's farm on December 2, 2013.

Only yesterday, one Fasola Simon was hacked and shot on his farm. We are taken aback that the government is still foot-dragging on the implementation of the MoU despite reporting all these incidents to appropriate quarters.

"Since October 2013, majority of our people have abandoned their farms with the hope that government would intervene decisively to create conducive atmosphere required for them to go back to the farms where they eke their living. The waiting is becoming an endless game with hunger ravaging them. Despite this, they can't participate in the on-going preparation of land for the next planting season for fear of attack by the herdsmen."

Some residents of the area who recounted their experiences in the past 15 years. Eighty-year-old Chief Matthew Olukokun from Asa said the people had always been at the receiving end of the nefarious activities of the Fulani herdsmen in Ketuland. He added that aside from carrying out wanton destruction of farmlands and indiscriminate killing of people, the Fulani herdsmen were also fond of raping women in the area.

The octogenarian alleged that some Fulani herdsmen once invaded a hamlet in Asa and gang-raped a mother and her daughter while on another occasion they waylaid and raped a newly wedded bride who was on her way to fetch water from the river:

"We are fed up with the menace of the Fulani herdsmen. Apart from destroying our farms, they take their cattle into our rivers, our only source of drinking water to defecate inside. We have taken them to court and the court has ordered that they should stay away from Ketuland but they have refused."

Revd. Enoch Adimu Korole: "We got a judgment against the Fulani in court

and we even held a meeting in Abeokuta with them and the police and we agreed that anytime they destroyed anybody's farm, they would have to pay compensation to such a person. But whenever they destroyed people's farm they would not only refuse to pay but they would also attack and sometimes even kill the owner of the farm. And if our people should react, the police would come after us and arrest our people and we have to pay huge money for bail.

"We are surprised that the Ogun State Government officials could have said that the judgment we got against the Fulani that has not been appealed by anyone has expired. The Fulani have continued to kill us and even our schools in this area are closed whenever they are around because of the security threat they pose to our children. We want the Ogun State Government to live up to its responsibility of providing security for us as indigenes."

Prince Emmanuel Alashe from Ibeku village: "We have suggested that the government should restrict the Fulani herdsmen to river valleys. Because of the decisive manner our immediate neighbours, Benin Republic have dealt with them, they don't threaten their people not to talk of killing them. But we don't want to take the laws in our hands. The state government claims that they set up a committee to tackle this problem but what we have discovered is that the members of the committee are civil servants, teachers and other government officials who don't even feel what we experience around here."

Matthew Fatunbi from Agbon-Ojodu called on the government to bar the Fulani herdsmen completely from grazing their cattle throughout Ketuland.

Touched by the perennial plight of the Ketu people, a governorship aspirant of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), Chief Yomi Majekodunmi, promised that if elected, his administration would effectively tackle the recurrent clashes between farmers and the Fulani herdsmen in the area.