

From **JOHN ADAMS**, Minna

NORMALCY is gradually returning to Kpaidna, Kopa, Daighna and Bar'Kuta communities in Bosso Local Government Area of Niger State invaded by some soldiers barely one month ago.

The villagers had fled their homes after a bloody clash with soldiers from 31, Field Artillery Brigade, Minna, when the Army invaded these communities in the wee hours in what the Army called "cordon and search operation".

The Army claimed that it was acting on a security report that the villagers had stockpiled arms in their houses, hence its decision to embark on the operation. No fewer than 11 soldiers and 10 villagers were killed while several others were injured.

The over 5,000 inhabitants of these predominantly farming communities, however, fled their homes soon after the clash to other neighboring communities for fear of a possible reprisal from the military. When Daily Sun visited the communities over the weekend, most of the villagers were seen going about with their normal farming activities while the women were busy clearing the debris of the destruction caused by the military.

The District Head of Bar'Kuta, one of the affected communities, Alhaji Mohammed Maigari, said they have no choice than to return to their communities to continue with their farming activities because that is the only occupation they have to earn their living.

Maigari who described the military invasion as the darkest day in the communities, maintained that they had lived in peace with their neighbors mostly Fulani herdsmen for decades without any misunderstanding, adding the people have no record of criminality.

The reason therefore given for the Military invasion, he insisted was just to "give a dog a bad name in order to hang it", stressing that "as peaceful farming communities, we have no reason to stock pike arms as alleged by the military."

He said though the people are gradually returning to their homes, "they are yet to recover from the trauma of the invasion. Our women and children are still living in fear, they are yet to overcome the trauma."

Normalcy returns to Niger communities after military invasion



• A destroyed military vehicle. Inset: Aftermath of the invasion

The fear of communities is further heightened by the recent threat by the military that it would return to the communities to search for their missing rifles. The Army was said to have told the Chief Security Adviser on Security to the Governor that two rifles, a video camera and a walkie-talkie belonging to the military were still missing. After the crisis, it was gathered that six rifles and some other items of property belonging to Army were recovered from the villages. In addition, police said they were able to recover two other rifles from various locations in the bush in the communities and were handed over to the army authorities.

A meeting between the government and the Military on whether the military should be allowed to go back

to the communities in search of their "missing guns" ended in a deadlock.

Daily Sun gathered that government officials in the meeting tried to convince the military not to go back to the communities because of a possible backlash. The meeting reportedly broke up abruptly and this did not go down well with the government team.

A source said: "We tried to make them believe that a return to the villages has the likelihood of causing another clash but the soldiers did not agree with us. We even suggested that the Emir of Minna will use his village and district heads to comb the forests for the missing arms but this too did not go down well with the soldiers."

Meanwhile the Emir of Minna, Alhaji Umar Farouk Bahagohas urged the people to return to their homes and go about with their normal farming business as everything is being done to prevent a future occurrence.

The emir who stated this when he paid a visit to the communities at the weekend, advised the people to always maintain peace and stop taking laws into their hands. He was accompanied by the chairman of Bosso LG, Bawa Malik, Salihu Shadafi, member representing Bosso/Paiko Federal Constituency and members of the Minna, Emirate Council.

insist on compensation as military threatens force

20,000 Almajiris, I

From **BILLY GRAHAM**, Yola