

Outrage as herdsmen kill 50 in 6 Benue communities

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- Gov Ortom begs FG to forestall total breakdown of law and order

- Police deploy personnel, amid security meeting at Gov't House

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No fewer than 50 persons including women, children and members of the Livestock Guards have been reportedly massacred by herdsmen in six communities in Benue State.

The communities are Gaambe-Tiev, Ayilamo and Turan in Logo Local Government Area and Umenger, Tse-Akor and Tomatar near Tse-Abi in Nongov District in Guma Local Government Area.

Daily Sun gathered that the invading herdsmen stormed Gaambe-Tiev, Ayilamo and Turan around 10am on New Year's day as the people were closing from church and opened fire on them. The assailants also attacked Umenger and Tse-Akor earlier.

At about 3am on Tuesday, the herders were said to have moved from house to house in Tomatar, knocking on doors and gruesomely killing residents with machetes.

At the time of filing this report, Dr. Gajir Hembao Tsoho of the Department of Surgery disclosed that over 30 victims were receiving treatment at the Benue State University Teaching Hospital (BSUTH) while many corpses had been deposited at the morgue.

At press time, more corpses were still being brought into the morgue from Tomatar while three of the wounded were said to have died while receiving treatment at the hospital.

Among the dead were a father and his two-year-old son and a young man said to have returned three days ago after completing his National Youth Service Corps (NYSC).

The development has left many villagers fleeing the affected communities in droves while those in neighbouring communities too have continued to leave for fear of attack by the herdsmen.

The police have deployed more personnel to the affected communities to stem the killings.

The Police Public Relations Officer, ASP Moses Yamu confirmed the attacks but failed to give casualty figure.

Governor Samuel Ortom confirmed that several people including nine members of the Livestock Guard were killed by the herdsmen.

Rising from an emergency security meeting, the governor described the attack as unacceptable and unfair even as he called on the Federal Government to act fast to forestall a break down of law and order in the state.

Ortom maintained that there was no going back on the implementation of the anti-open grazing law.

"Now, these herdsmen are coming to invade the land and sending the people running helter-skelter again after we have started the implementation (of the anti-open grazing law) and everybody received it. Those who wanted to leave left and nobody was attacked. This is not acceptable. We are not going to accept it.

"There is no going back on the implementation of this law. This is our land and the law was duly passed by our people. Now, those people who have been killed, their blood will cry to the Federal Government and if Federal Government doesn't do something, their blood will cry to the Almighty God and I'm sure that God will deal with the situation Himself.

"This is not fair and it is not acceptable. I think this is where the Federal Government must come in immediately to stop the mayhem because these people are known. We heard that they met in one state where they mobilised to come to Benue. They passed through roadblocks.

"These people are known and they have sophisticated weapons. So, why have they not been arrested all these while? This is the question we are asking. Does it mean that we should allow the people to take laws into their hands and also buy guns and begin to kill? Is that what we want? There will be anarchy and nobody knows what will happen thereafter. This is not fair.

"We must rise up. Nigerians must rise up. The Federal Government must rise up to protect us because this is not right. They own the security apparatus. The ones that are here are doing their best but there should be more and that is what we are calling for."

In another development, the Kwara Police command said it has arrested additional 22 suspected hoodlums in connection with the New Year's eve attack on worshippers in the Ilorin metropolis, bringing the total number of arrests to 32.

Commissioner of Police, Lawan Ado said the attack was not a premeditated religious attack as it was being speculated in some quarters.

He said the command received a distress call at about 1am that hoodlums, armed with dangerous weapons were harassing and intimidating people and commercial motorcycle riders along Ibrahim Taiwo Isale area of the metropolis.

"This group of unruly youths were said to be throwing fireworks, including knockout and bangers of different calibres indiscriminately into premises of both the Catholic and Methodist churches and the United Secondary School, where members of the Quareeb Muslim Group and Christian worshippers were having their crossover programmes, causing a stampede in the premises of the school.

"This commotion gave the hoodlums an opportunity to gain entry into the church premises, where they snatched handsets, damaged five vehicles belonging to worshippers and three persons sustained varying degrees of injury.

"On the strength of the report, policemen drafted to the scene promptly brought the situation under control while 10 suspects were initially arrested and those injured rushed to hospital where they were treated," he said.

The CP said those arrested would be charged to court as soon as investigation was completed.

Meanwhile, the Kwara State Governor, Alhaji Abdulfatah Ahmed at separate meetings with leaderships of Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) Kwara State and Quareeb Association vowed to ensure that perpetrators of the attacks were brought to book.

He urged religious bodies not to allow miscreants cause disaffections among various religious adherents in the state.

"This state is a State of Harmony. And we must all collectively work to sustain our cherished peaceful environment. Don't play into the hands of mischief-makers by labeling the activities of miscreants on the New Year eve as religious issue. The benefit of unity is too high to allow it slip threw our hands," he said.

The governor promised to immediately set up a committee to look into immediate and remote causes of the activities of the miscreants in order to find a permanent solution.

Responding, chairman of CAN, Prof. Tunde Opoola, urged the governor to ensure that justice was truly done as a way of assuring that the Christian community in the state renew their confidence in the state government.