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Plateau massacre: How killer-herdsmen wiped out family of 22-yr-old man

- *Woman loses husband, 2 children, many other families bereaved too*

Gyang Bere, Jos

For people in Plateau State, Saturday, June 23, 2018, would for life remain a black day. It was a day that over 100 people were massacred in several communities by Fulani killer-herdsmen.

From that day till date, 22-year-old Luka Benjamin, a native of Gashish community, Barkin-Ladi Local Government Area of the state, has been wrapped with a blanket of anguish, sorrow and pain.

Though Luka survived the gruesome killings by the Fulani militia armed with sophisticated weapons and machetes, 13 members of his family perished in the early morning attack in Nghar village as the women, children, and the aged were fast asleep.

The attack started in the afternoon of the previous day, about 3pm, when mourners returning from the burial of a 90-year-old man, late Da. Peter Jakawa at Church of Christ in Nigeria (COCIN), RCC Gashish, were ambushed and massacred in a hail of bullets that hit them like a million raindrops in a sudden downpour.

Like individuals incarnated by the devil, the murderous Fulani militia after what turned out to be the opening attack, moved into the village proper in the cool of the night and set homes ablaze. As some of the people rushed out in a bid to escape, they were mercilessly shot dead or cut down with machetes.

That was how members of Luka's family became numbered among the numerous dead victims.

Right now, Luka is helpless and hopeless; he is a living dead and a walking corpse. At the burial of the dead family members, he was overcome by grief as he watched the lifeless bodies of his relations being lowered into one grave. His wife, Esther, and their two children were burnt beyond recognition; his father Benjamin and mother were shot to death and burnt while his elder brother, Pam Benjamin and his wife, Sarah, and three children were slaughtered and burnt including two younger sisters. Also affected was his grandfather.

Though Luka survived without any injury, but he is overwhelmed by intense pain as he wails profusely each time he recalls the memory of the manner in which his wife and two children, who he had tried to save, were killed with machete cuts.

His decision not sleep at home after the mourners were attacked and killed in the nearby village was what saved him, otherwise he would have been killed along with his family.

He opted to remain outside and keep vigil in the hope of giving advance warning to the village. The attackers invaded Nghar village unexpectedly as Luka and other vigilantes, who were also keeping vigil worked hard to repel them. Sunday Sun learnt that other Fulani residing in the area led and guided the attackers. The sheer number of the invaders and their sophisticated weapons overwhelmed the vigilantes.

He watched helplessly as the Fulani gunmen rained hot bullets on his family and other victims in the village.

The cries for help of his wife, children and younger sisters will remain evergreen in his memory.

Luka is left in despair to start life all over again as all he laboured for were wiped out within a twinkling of an eye. Today, he does not have a roof over his head as his house and household property were burnt with his family.

Recalling what happened during the horrible night of terror, he told Sunday Sun, during a brief chat after the mass burial, that women, children and the aged who survived the attack fled the village to Heipang community at the Barkin-Ladi Local Government headquarters for safety.

"I am weak, helpless and hopeless at the moment, I have never seen a thing like this. Why must his attack happen at this point? Where am I going now that I have nothing with me? I have lost all I laboured for; my wife and children were my greatest assets and they were all killed in a day.

"I lost my father, my mother, my wife, two children, my elder brother, his wife with three children and two younger sisters besides close friends and several relations in the attack.

"I survived by the grace of God when I was trying to assist my wife and two children who eventually perished in the attack; the entire 13 members of my family were killed. The attack started from neighbouring villages and we thought it would not come to our village but we were taken by surprise.

"I can identify the people who carried out the attack, among them are my neighbours; one of them is Babangida Shagari and Babangida Ibrahim. I saw them leading the attackers. Children, women, the aged and men were killed and burnt beyond recognition.

"I felt like taking my life when I saw the burnt corpses of my wife, two children and numerous relations loaded in a vehicle for mass burial which the military forced the community to do. Some of the corpses were loaded in wheelbarrow, the village has been completely destroyed, sacked and the Fulanis are ready to take over the land. I prefer to have died than losing my wife, children and parents in that manner, where will I start from, who do I go to now?"

The case of a 35-year-old Anna Ishaya, a mother of four, is equally very pathetic. Luckily, she survived with her son, Mangai Ishaya, with gunshots while trying to escape with the other children. She was caught in the ambush of the mourners return- ing from the burial of the nonagenarian.

Anna lost, her husband, Mr. Ishaya Adamu, two children and three other women in the family, namely, Peace Yohanna, Rita James and Deborah. But four-year-old Sarah, who was shot on her shoulder that fateful day, is currently receiving medical attention at the University of Jos Teaching Hospital.

Recalling that day of horror, Anna told Sunday Sun: "The incident happened at Yalwa village in Gashish District of Barkin-Ladi Local Government Area of the state about 1pm on that Saturday. I was returning from a burial in a neighbouring village where people were attacked and I narrowly escaped.

"Not up to 10 minutes after I returned home, I saw strange people coming into the village and I drew the attention of an old blind man who was later killed that Fulani had invaded the community.

"Shortly after that, I saw the Fulani taking cover in an uncompleted build in the community. I raised alarm and called the security to come and help. One of the military men, who is a Christian, informed their commander and asked me to tell people to run for their lives. I started screaming and calling my son and other people in the village to run.

"Suddenly, gunshots were coming from different directions. The security men were also running for their lives. The Fulani sighted me running with my son, they came after us but they were shooting up, and we were running and crawling on the ground; Luckily, we escaped but 67 persons were killed and hurriedly buried that day. About 11 corpses including two pastors were recovered on Sunday and they were also buried except the pastors who were deposited at the mortuary of Jos University Teaching Hospital.

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