

Quit notice to herdsmen: Untold story of how mayhem was visited on Oyo town

■ Sunday Igboho, Sarkin Fulani encounter in Ibarapa land ■ Houses, property razed ■ We have been rendered homeless –Sarkin Fulani

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From **Oluseye Ojo, Ibadan**

The seven-day ultimatum given by a popular traditional security coordinator, who recently turned freedom fighter, Chief Sunday Adeyemo, fondly called Sunday Igboho, to Fulani herdsmen residing in Ibarapa axis of Oyo State, elapsed last Friday January 22. Seven days earlier he had vowed that on the expiration of the ultimatum, he would personally drive the Fulani herdsmen out of Ibarapa land.

The activist, who fought on the frontline during the Ife/Modakeke war in Osun State some years ago, had said that he was miffed by the incessant killings, destruction of farmland and kidnapping for ransom by some Fulani herdsmen, when he visited the Sarkin Fulani of Oyo State in Igangan, Alhaji Abdulkadir Saliu, on Friday January 15, this year.

Adeyemo stated that he went to Ibarapa and met differently with monarchs in the towns, asked them what they wanted as a permanent solution to the crisis in the area. The monarchs, according to him, said they did not want herdsmen in Ibarapa any longer. After hearing from the kings and the people of Ibarapa land, he went to Igangan to have a meeting with Alhaji Saliu on how to ensure that the kidnapping, killings and destruction of farms stopped.

Ighoho's first encounter with Fulani leader

Within one week, Adeyemo had visited Ibarapa, particularly Igangan two times. The first one was when he gave the ultimatum. On the occasion, he said he met three road blocks mounted by Fulani, and he navigated all of them. He stated that anyone that is not on appointment would never be allowed access to Sarkin Fulani.

When he started talking with the Sarkin, he alleged that he was shot with guns by the Fulani. But the bullets had no impact on him, adding that he collected the guns from them. The turn of event, he stated, prompted him to issue the seven-day ultimatum.

Some houses in the Fulani settlement were razed during the visit and four persons were injured during the visit. After Igboho left the place, Fulani herdsmen also reportedly hacked down four persons that were returning from their farm on the same Friday night. The situation heightened tension in the state and the whole country. Some argued that he did not have any right or power to issue the quit notice. Some people also supported him.

The situation was still persisting when Governor Seyi Makinde made a state broadcast on Wednesday January 20, that Igboho has no right whatsoever to order any Nigerian out of the state, adding that every Nigerian has the right to live in any part of the country on his or her choice.

Though the governor did not specifically mention Igboho in the broadcast, he promised to deal with anyone disrupting the peace of the state. He noted that the enemies of the state are neither the Hausa-Fulani pastoralists, who are looking for pasture for their flock, nor the farmers, who are seeking to produce food for human consumption. The enemies, he said, are hoodlums, bandits and kidnappers that have been fomenting troubles in the state.

But a number of the residents criticised the governor on his stance, saying that he has not displayed enough courage like his counterpart in Ondo State, Rotimi Akeredolu, who also gave herdsmen seven-day ultimatum to vacate forest reserves.

The governor went a step further on the issue on Friday when he told the new Commissioner of Police in the state, Mrs Ngozi Onadeko, to arrest and treat like common criminals those fueling ethnic tension and fanning the embers of crisis in the state, though he did not also mention

Igboho. Onadeko had paid him a courtesy call.



Igboho visits to Igangan second time

Based on the perceived undercurrents, many people had thought that Igboho would not go to Ibarapa land as he earlier promised. But he defied Makinde's order. The people of Ibarapa, especially the youths trooped out in large numbers to welcome the Yoruba activist. They received him with excitement, sang and danced. He eventually addressed them Igangan Town Hall.

According to him, the crisis in Ibarapa has ended, saying he was satisfied that the 'criminals' had fled the community.

He stated further that he was not against non-Yoruba in Southwest.

His words: “They have gone. We have sent them out of our land and they cannot come back again. Kidnappers cannot rule over us. They can’t take over our land from us. It belongs to us. They should stop threatening. Those who live with us peacefully, we are not fighting them. But how will a visitor claim one’s house from him?”

“If you live with us in peace, we have no problem with you. But if you decide to kidnap and kill us, we don’t want you here. I assure Yoruba people, particularly those in Oyo State, that there is no danger. This one we have started here in Oyo State will not end here. We are going to other parts of the Southwest. Tell herdsmen in Ekiti, Ondo and Osun states, in fact, in all Southwest states, that they should get ready for us because we are coming.”

Igboho never went to Fulani settlement again – Source

An impeccable source, who was in the same car with Igboho throughout the journey to and from Igangan in Ibarapa on Friday January 22, told Sunday Sun yesterday: “It is true that Igboho went to Igangan on Friday. I was in the same car with him. But we did not just go to the place. We went to Igangan in company of the police Area Commander for Ibarapa. We took off from Ibadan and we met the Area Commander after Eruwa.

“Then, we went together to Igangan, having passed through Igbo-Ora, Tapa, Idere, and Aiyete. A large crowd came to welcome us. They were visibly angry. In the presence of the security agents, Igboho addressed the youths. We went there with 20 vehicles. The police even told Igboho to make his address very short because of the crowd.

“After he addressed them, we left and the Area Commander was with us till we got to Igbo-Ora. We left for Oke-Ogun. We saw many teams of security agencies, including Operation Burst (the joint security outfit of the state) and they also saw that we did not go to Fulani settlement. But I must tell you that the Sarkin Fulani lives like a king in the town. There are three roadblocks that were heavily guarded by Fulani on the day we went there and gave the ultimatum. So, it was on our way to Iseyin that we heard news that the Fulani settlement had been attacked.”

But sources within Ibarapa stated that many youths in Ibarapa have started going into the different areas to eject the herdsmen, while some Fulani youths have also been repelling the attack.

Sarkin Fulani speaks

The Sarkin Fulani in Oyo State, Alhaji Abdulkadir Saliu, however, said his people were not the ones kidnapping and killing people in Ibarapa. He explained that some of the kidnappers that were even arrested were from Zamfara and Kebbi states. His people that settled in Ibarapa, have been law-abiding and they have always been supporting the policies of the state government.

He said that the rate of crime might have skyrocketed in Igangan based on the mining site in the town, adding that people from different countries in Africa have been coming to the mining site.

Saliu stated that some of the foreigners might pretend that they were going to the mining site, but have evil intension. He contended that those people might have been the ones killing and

kidnapping people in Ibarapa. He urged the government and security agencies to look into the issue of mining site in Igangan so that peace could return to the area.

But in the evening of Friday, January 22, the Sarkin Fulani, alleged that three persons were killed in the Fulani settlement, while his cars, residence and other houses were razed by people that attacked them. Taking the stock on yesterday, he stated that 11 cars were razed.

Speaking with journalists on Saturday morning, he said that he had left Igangan for Abeokuta in Ogun State to take refuge and later refused to disclose his whereabouts for security reasons. He said that all the houses in the settlement had been burnt, while the four cars he owns were burnt, alongside seven other cars that belonged to his children.

Ibarapa people

Ibarapa land is located approximately 100 kilometres North of the coast of Lagos, and about 95 kilometres West of Ibadan, the Oyo State capital. Traditionally, it comprises seven principal towns known as the 'Ibarapa Meje' (Ibarapa Seven), which are Eruwa, Lanlate, Igbo-Ora, Aiyete, Tapa, Idere, and Igangan.

As at 2011, the total population of the seven principal towns with their surrounding villages and farmsteads was approximately 400,000. They are spread within three local government areas in the state. Eruwa and Lanlate are located in Ibarapa East, Igbo-Ora and Idere in Ibarapa Central, as well as Aiyete, Tapa and Igangan in Ibarapa North local government area. At least, 30 different villages are under the seven principal towns of Ibarapaland.

The area consists mostly of rolling savannah with forests situated along the southern border and in isolated patches along river courses such as the Ogun. This probably made it favourable to pastoralists. Fulani herdsmen are visible in many settlements in Ibarapa land, where they have been rearing their cattle.

Ibarapa people and herders

In the beginning, the Ibarapa people and the Fulani herdsmen that settled in different areas of the land had no problem. The relationship, as gathered, started for more than 100 years. They lived together peacefully. The Ibarapa people are farmers and they planted majorly cassava, yam, maize, vegetables cashew, mango and so on.

It was gathered that there had been inter-ethnic marriages between the Ibarapa people and Fulani herdsmen, which further cemented the relationship. The Fulani women, for many years, would hawk processed cow milk in different towns of Ibarapa and the people would buy and drink. A number of the herdsmen reportedly have maize and cassava farms, and they have also been enjoying the local food, having stayed or been born in the area.

Investigation revealed that problem started brewing in Ibarapa land when herdsmen began to graze their cattle on the farmland of the indigenous people of the area. Some local farmers too began to either poisoning their farmland and streams where cattle get water, the turn of event created serious tension in the area.

The Oyo State government and the Oyo State police command on different occasions intervened with a view to finding a lasting solution to the crisis. The Ibarapa people and other parts of the state as well as the herdsmen had been at the state police headquarters, Eleyele, Ibadan at different times to sign peace accords.

In the peace accord, it was stated that if a local farmer kills a cow, the police would intervene and ensure that adequate compensation is paid to the owner of the cow. Also, if herdsmen graze their cows on farms, the extent of the damage would be assessed and the commensurate compensation would be paid to the local farmers.

Thereafter, the local farmers complained that the peace accord did not discourage herdsmen from grazing on their farms and the police as well as the government seemed to be helpless. They stated that there had not been tangible things done to put a stop to the crisis.

But the leadership of the Fulani community had explained at different fora that the herdsmen that have been destroying plantations on farmlands are not those that settled in Ibarapa, but those who strayed to the area. They added that they too had fallen victims of those invaders. According to them, the invaders had also stolen many of the cows too.

Killings, kidnapping for ransom, and destruction of farmland

But the present crisis, according to the indigenous people of Ibarapa land, was caused by incessant killings and kidnapping for ransom in the area. They pointed fingers at the Fulani herdsmen, alleging that the herdsmen have been perpetrating the evil with impunity.

A former governorship aspirant of the All Progressives Congress (APC) in the state in 2019, Dr. Olusola Ayandele, who hails from Idere, is one of the notable people that had spoken on the development.

He condemned in strong terms what he described as siege on Ibarapa land by some criminal elements, which has culminated in the killing, maiming and kidnapping of many residents and indigenes of the area in recent times.

He said in a statement by his Personal Assistant (media), Sola Adeleke: "Within a space of one month, some notable indigenes of Ibarapa land have lost their lives in the hands of these devilish attackers. Early last month, for example, Dr Abdulafatai Aborode was murdered in cold blood by unknown gunmen suspected to be herdsmen in Igangan and as people were battling with the shock of his brutal assassination, tragedy struck again in the neighbouring Idere community when some satanic elements attacked a filling station where they killed two young men and the owner of the fuel station, Alhaja Serifat Adisa.

"Hardly would a week pass by without at least a case of unwarranted killing or kidnapping of innocent persons in Ibarapa land in addition to the many cases of destruction of farmland and private property by Fulani herdsmen. Most people in all the towns and villages across the zone can no longer practice farming again as a result of fear of dreaded attacks in the hands of herdsmen."

Ayandele, however, appealed to the relevant authorities, particularly Governor Makinde and all the heads of security agencies to be alive to their responsibility and restore normalcy to the area without any delay.

Investigation revealed that Dr Abdulfatai Aborode, who hailed from Igangan, had spent many years abroad and returned to Igangan to do commercial farming. He employed many people, working in the farm. Herdsmen reportedly destroyed a portion of the farm and he went to report the incident to the head of Fulani community in Igangan.

It was alleged that he was not allowed to leave the place alive as he was hacked down with cutlasses by suspected herdsmen. Aborode is a younger brother to a former Commissioner for Environment in the state, Alhaji Majekodunmi Aborode. The independent petroleum marketer that was killed, Alhaja Adisa, was said to have resisted being abducted. In the process, she was shot dead, along with two of her staff.

The Asawo of Aiyete, Oba Emmanuel Okeniyi Borishabunmi, when contacted said that the challenges of kidnapping, killing and destruction of farmland have become worrisome to his subjects. He stated that he was not oblivious of the fact that some natives of Aiyete or Ibarapa had been conniving with the herdsmen to perpetrate the evil.

“Those who were arrested for kidnapping are Fulani people. We heard from many of them that Yoruba people were involved. But they are yet to tell us names of our people who were involved. Aside kidnapping, they destroyed our farms with their cows. They have turned us to lazy people because we are now buying food from outside Ibarapa because our people cannot go to their farms again.

“For instance; I planted two hectares of maize and their cows finished it. I approached a Fulani man, who is close to the farm and he said he didn’t know anything about it. Even, if you meet them in the farm, we would accept their apologies and move on. But the most annoying one is that of kidnaping and killing of innocent people.

“When vigilante are not effective, government established Amotekun Corps. When you leave Igboora for Idere, there was a woman, operating a filling station and they kidnapped her and killed her. A doctor, Akindele, was kidnapped in Tapa area. Also in Igangan, Monsuru, a cassava merchant, was kidnapped. All of the freed kidnapped victims, after paying ransom, said they were kidnapped by Fulani.

“Our people are not cooperating with Amotekun Corps and that is what is annoying me. If not, they could have arrested many of the kidnappers. For instance, the Fulani used to ask our people to drop money in a certain location so as to release their abducted relatives. If they had consulted Amotekun, they could have handed over the money to Amotekun so that they strategise to arrest them. Our people said they did not want to involve Amotekun so that the kidnappers would not kill their relatives in their captivity.

“All the arrested Fulanis are not from our neighboring villages. They are from far locations. In fact, they are from another states entirely. When this issue started, we approached Seriki, who is their leader here, but he said he didn’t know them. We know we have some Yoruba who are

behind them, but we have not seen anyone coming out to identify a Yoruba man as part of them. All arrested suspected criminals are Fulani.”

But the Balogun Asawo of Aiyete, Chief Raheem Gafar, said: “Our demand that the Fulani should leave our land did not just start. It started many decades ago. We, the Ibarapa people, are predominantly farmers and we plant cassava, that we call ‘Paki’, apart from maize and other plants. The Fulani herdsmen have destroyed our farmland. We can no longer farm. Our children that graduated from schools that have not secured paid employment could not go into farming because the Fulani herdsmen will send them into perpetual debt.

“The terrible dimension is that the Fulani themselves have been planting cassava and maize. But cows have never destroyed their own farms. We now buy ‘paki’ (cassava) and ‘agbado’ (maize) from Fulani on our fathers’ land because they would not allow our own plantation to grow. They should leave our land. We don’t want them again.

“What they are doing to us, can our people do it to them in the North? If a Yoruba man slaps a Fulani child in Kano, or Sokoto, they could behead that Yoruba man for it. Don’t forget that our people obtain loans to farm and the lenders will not tolerate any excuse, you must pay back their money.”

The Elenpe of Tapa, Oba Sunday Titiloye Oyekanmi, also told this reporter that at least 10 natives of Ibarapa had been killed by herdsmen. He accused Sarkin Fulani of Oyo State, who resides in Igangan, Alhaji Saliu, who is also the president, Jamu Nati Fulbe, a Fulani socio-cultural organisation in the Southwest, of compounding the problem.

His words: “We are farmers and our father gave land to the Fulani to rear their cattle. But they did not sell the land to them. What they did was not for life. What is happening in this area does not mean the Ibarapa is in total confusion. There is no war in Ibarapa.

“The Seriki Fulani has now assumed the position of assigning land to Fulani and Bororo that have been coming to settle in Ibarapa. The Seriki would not inform the land owners. These people would rape our women and daughters. If a man and his wife are going to the farm, the herdsmen would stop them on the road, and would rape his wife in his presence. If he dares to challenge them, he could be killed. They destroy our farms, apart from kidnapping and killing us. This is why our people, especially the youths are angry. If a Fulani committed an offence and you took him to the police station, orders would come from Abuja that he should be released.

“The Oyo State government should call a meeting. The Fulani said they are the owners of our land. We don’t have land for farming again. Things cannot continue like this. It must stop. We cannot be slaves on our own land.”

Both Oba Oyekanmi and the Balogun Asawo of Aiyete, Gafar, gave kudos to the Yoruba activist, Chief Igboho for the seven-day ultimatum he gave to Fulani herdsmen to vacate Ibarapa land. They said they have been pushed to the wall.

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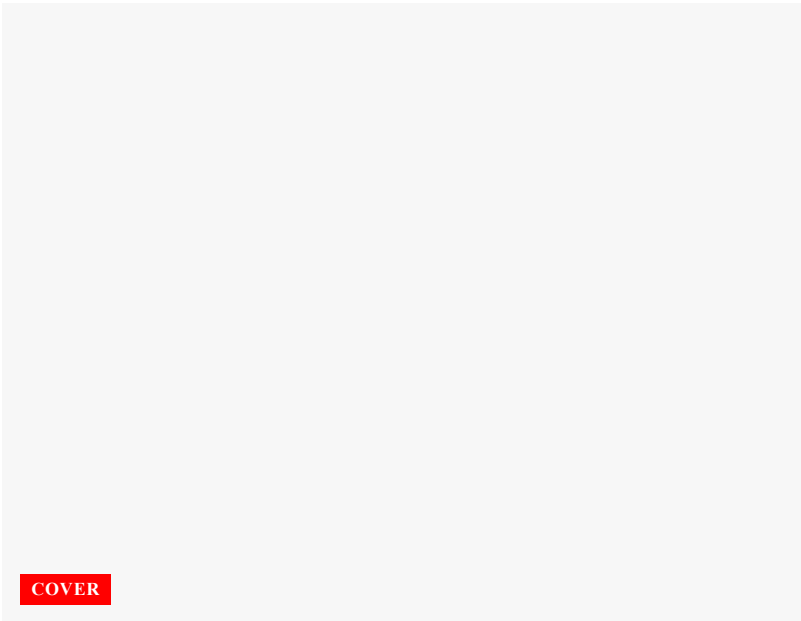
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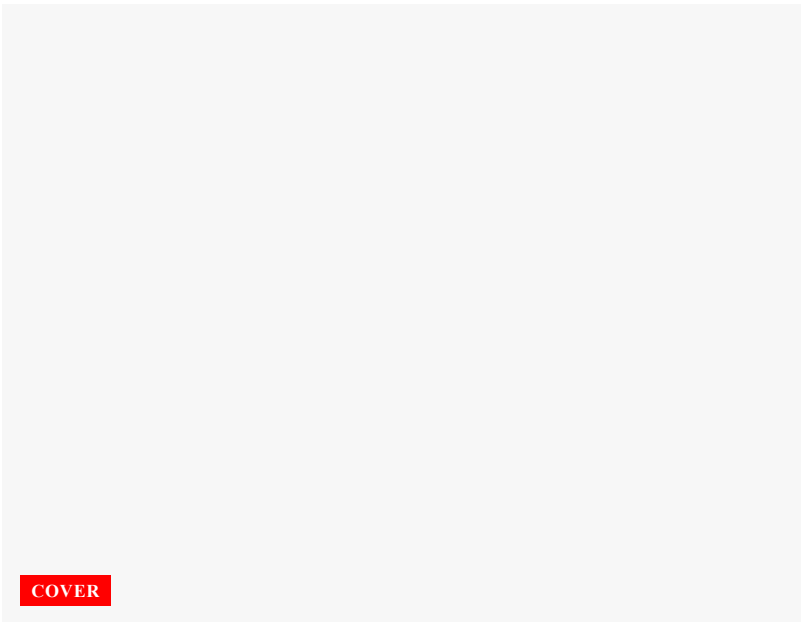
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