

Over 115 killed in Benue, Plateau in 2 days

From **Rose Ejembi,**
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Bere, Jos

OVER 115 persons have been killed by suspected herdsmen and bandits in Benue and Plateau states in the last two days.

In Benue, over 100 persons were feared killed in a coordinated attack by gunmen across four council wards of Katsina-Ala Local Government Area of the State between Saturday and Sunday.

Daily Sun gathered that the

gunmen were suspected to be armed herdsmen who were working in connivance with loyalists of the slain Benue militia warlord, Terwase Akwaza, alias Gana, to unleash terror on the people.

Sources from the area disclosed to newsmen, yesterday, that many communities were burnt down, while people in the affected areas have continued to run helter-skelter for safety.

When contacted, Chairman of Katsina Ala local government, Alfred Atera, confirmed the attack and the casualty figure, adding that four council wards were affected. Atera listed the affected council wards to include Yoyo, Utange, Mbatyumberev and Mbayongo.

"Four council wards are under attack by the Fulani; they are Yoyo, Utange, Mbatyumberev and Mbayongo. More than 100 people at different places have been killed since the attack on Saturday."

Atera also alleged that the attackers suspected to be Fulani herdsmen were operating in a Guerilla manner, in connivance with gang members of the slain Gana.

"The Gana remnants are conniving with them (suspected herdsmen) to cause havoc and unrest in our area. They (bandits and herders) are killing and dropping the corpses and move on (to attack other places). Some (families) were able to claim the corpses of their relatives for burial.

Opining that security agencies may have been overwhelmed by the coordinated attacks, Atera said the attackers have now developed a strategy of attacking many places at the same time.

"If they attack in Kwaghaondo now, the next thing you hear is they were attacking Yoyo and

Utange at the same time. So, the military are just moving here and there because if they get information of the people attacking a place, before they get there, the attackers have finished and moved to another point. That is the situation in Katsina-Ala right now. Efforts to speak with the force Commander of Operation Whirl Stroke (OPWS), Brig. Gen. Clement Apere, by telephone were unsuccessful as he did not respond to calls by Daily Sun at the time of filing this report.

On her part, State Police Command's Public Relations Officer (PPRO), DSP Catherine Anene, said she was yet to receive the report from the area.

Also, on Sunday, no fewer than 15 persons, mainly women and children, were reportedly killed during by suspected herdsmen during a night attack on Dong and Kwi villages of Jos North and Riyom Local Government Areas of Plateau State.

Daily Sun gathered the suspected herdsmen invaded Dong community and wiped away a family of six, while two others were murdered in a separate episode. It was learned that some suspected herdsmen also invaded Kwi village in Riyom LGA, at about 11pm and wiped out a family of seven.

Member representing Riyom Constituency in the House of Assembly, Timothy Dantong, confirmed the killings.

Dantong said the attack took place on Sunday night by suspected Fulani herdsmen, while the villagers were on their sleep.

The legislator condemned the attack and described it as barbaric and urged the security agencies to fish out the perpetrators for prosecution.

He expressed sadness that his constituents are persistently

being killed by unknown gunmen, and noted that Riyom has suffered unstoppable attacks since 2001.

The Police Public Relations Officer (PPRO) of the Plateau State Police Command, ASP Gabriel Ubah, confirmed the killing of seven persons in a statement, yesterday morning, in Jos.

Reacting to the development, Plateau State Governor, Simon Lalong and Deputy Chairman, Senate Committee on Defence and Senator representing Plateau North, Istifanus Gyang, expressed deep shock over the fresh killings in the State.

Lalong, in a statement signed Commissioner for information and Communication, Dan Manjang, described the killings as barbaric, callous and unacceptable. Gyang, also, described the incident as totally unacceptable and urged the Plateau State Police Commissioner to arrest and prosecute those behind the attack.

Meanwhile, Benue State Governor, Samuel Ortom said he would no longer announce the death of people killed by herdsmen in the state, even as he stressed the need for the people to begin to rise up and defend themselves.

Ortom stated this, on Sunday, at the interdenominational church service organised by the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) at the Chapel of Grace, Government House, Makurdi, to mark the end of a seven-day prayer and fasting programme for peace in the state.

Meanwhile, Plateau State Governor, Simon Lalong and Deputy Chairman, Senate Committee on Defence and Senator representing Plateau North, Istifanus Gyang, have expressed deep shock over the fresh killings Plateau state.

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meeting are quite commendable and timely; the issues discussed are germane, and are clear indications that men of goodwill are working together to solve the nation's current challenges.

"As one of the leaders of the APC in the South West and, more so, that he presided over the Asaba meeting of the southern governors, nothing could be more spirit-lifting than the outcome of the Lagos meeting, on Sunday. He, therefore, endorses all the resolutions reached by the leaders who attended the meeting," he added.

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all hands are on deck.

He noted that the government and people of Benue State would continue to remain committed to justice, equity and fairness to all.

Leader of the delegation, Prof. Fatai Aremu said they were in the state for a study tour as the institute had selected Benue among states to be visited by the Senior Executive Programme as a result of the achievements recorded by the present administration in the state.