

# The massacre in Plateau

FOR the peace-loving people of Plateau State, this year's Christmas was a tragic one. In bizarre and coordinated attacks, bandits invaded no fewer than 20 communities in the state from December 23, 2023, and killed over 100 people. Over 300 others were reportedly wounded and over 200 houses also torched. Reports indicated that the attacks started in Bokkos area and later spilled into Barkin Ladi. We had thought that, with the new regime in place and new military commanders, the attacks in different parts of the country would be brought to near zero. But this is not the case.

The best we have got from our leaders is lamentations and empty promises. The Plateau State Governor, Caleb Mutfwang, condemned the killings, describing them as barbaric, brutal and unjustified. According to him, the government would take proactive measures to curb attacks against innocent civilians. The Commissioner of Police in Plateau State, Okoro Alawari, expressed grief over the deadly attacks and sympathized with the bereaved families. The commissioner also directed his deputy in charge of operations to relocate to Bokkos Local Government Area as he deployed a high-powered delegation of well-armed operational forces to the troubled areas to prevent further attacks.

In July, last year, similar incidents occurred in Mangu Council of Plateau State and some parts of Benue State. President Bola Tinubu condemned the attacks and ordered the arrest of the masterminds. Saying he found the festering attacks in Plateau and Benue states very depressing, Tinubu lamented that it was most unfortunate that in this orgy of violence an innocent eight-month-old baby in Farin Lamba community of Vwang District, Jos South Local Government, died in conflicts she knew nothing about.

2 Apart from the Plateau incident, there have been pockets of other attacks in some parts of the country. Sunday night, for instance, some gunmen invaded Immaculate Conception Catholic Church in the Abakaliki Local Government Area of Ebonyi State and killed three worshippers. Many others were wounded. The incident happened when a priest was celebrating a vigil mass.

We recall that during the immediate past administration of Muhammadu Buhari, such terrorist attacks were commonplace in parts of Kaduna, Katsina, Benue, Borno, Sokoto and many other states. Since 2009 when Boko Haram terrorists started their orgy of killings in the North, tens of thousands of people have been killed and over two million others displaced.

The terrorists have succeeded in cowing farmers and sending them out of their farms. This has resulted in food scarcity and high cost of food items, as Plateau and Benue states are the food basket of the country.

President Tinubu has been making efforts to attract foreign investors to Nigeria but, with the current upsurge in insecurity, it is doubtful if any investor would want to risk coming to Nigeria to invest.

No doubt, our image has plummeted greatly. The entire country is perceived to be a killing field. Nowhere is safe. The South-East contends with 'unknown gunmen'. The entire North is under the grip of Boko Haram, Islamic State West African Province (ISWAP) and Fulani herdsmen. The South-West lives in fear of bandits and ritual killers.

Something has to be done urgently to tackle

the spate of insecurity in the country. We cannot continue to lose precious lives to the dregs of the society.

President Tinubu promised to renew the hope of Nigerians in many sectors of our national life, including security. To achieve this, he has to go beyond the normal routine of sending troops to theatres of war when the deed is already done. His military commanders should deploy proactive measures.

We have been calling for the decentralization of our security architecture. A complex country like Nigeria should go beyond having just a central police system that caters for the whole populace. It is obvious that the terrorists attack soft targets to achieve their sinister motives. There is no way a central police system can effectively man every nook and cranny of our country. Local vigilance groups, who know the terrain well, can do better. This is what the South-West has achieved in Operation Amotekun. Though crime has not completely been eradicated in the region, the zone is about the safest in the country.

Our armed forces should be well equipped with modern, sophisticated weapons. On a number of occasions, the firepower of our soldiers could not match that of the terrorists. In the recent past, terrorists were reported to have invaded some of our military barracks and killed scores of soldiers. This is not a good advertisement of our efforts to tackle terrorism and banditry.

There should be no mercy in our bid to crush terrorists and bandits. Our security agencies should use maximum force. They should improve on their intelligence-gathering efforts and even take the war to terrorist enclaves. We acknowledge the exploits of our soldiers in recent times. But we encourage them to do more.

We must tackle insecurity first, if we must make any headway in sufficient food production, in attracting local and foreign investors, in stopping the exodus of our citizens to foreign lands and, above all, in reassuring our citizens that this government cares for them.