

Herdmen's attacks: Benue's death toll hits 52

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The death toll in the invasion of Zaki-Biam, the commercial nerve centre of Ukum Local Government Area of Benue State has risen to at least 52 casualties, *New Telegraph* has gathered. The gunmen were said to have invaded the popular yam market in the area about 2 pm on Monday and opened fire on the hapless traders in the day light, leaving at least 50 persons dead.

The hoodlums, *New Telegraph* gathered, invaded the market located along Kasar Road in the local government in 12 Bajaj motorcycles and four Toyota Corolla cars, and shot sporadically into the midst of people, killing many of them in the process.

In the invasion over 100

houses were razed, while business activities in the community were grounded to a halt.

It was also reported that a student, who had gone to the area to register for this year's Unified Tertiary Matriculation Examination (UTME), conducted by JAMB was also felled by the bullets of the assassins.

This is as all schools and other social events in the communities have been closed down forcefully, while residents of the area, who escaped being killed by the whiskers had fled the area in droves and taking refuge in the forest.

Governor, Samuel Ortom, yesterday canceled all official engagements including the scheduled swearing-in of new members of the State Executive Council, leading a delegation of security operatives and members of the state executive

council on an on-the-spot assessment of the destruction done to the people.

The governor, who visited the Light of Grace Hospital and Maternity and Saint Anthony Hospital in Zaki-Biam, where the injured and the corpses were taken, declared that the state government would take over the cost of treatment of the injured people and burial of the dead victims.

Ortom, who said he would not surrender the state to criminals, however, blamed the attack on the wanted criminal, Terwase Akwaza, aka Ghana, who had been terrorising residents of the area.

He condemned the attack and commiserated with families of the victims, promising that the state Security Council would redouble efforts at apprehending the culprits and bringing them to jus-

tice.

The governor said the latest development underscored the need for all good spirited individuals and organisations to join hands with the government to confront and surmount the security challenges.

Some of the residents, including Mbakeren Gaade, Mercy Godwin and Hembafan Aondohemba, who spoke to *New Telegraph*, pointed out that the invaders were dressed in military uniforms and were shooting at sight.

They further lamented that the attackers were out on a special mission to eliminate the Tiv people in Zaki-Biam.

According to Mercy Godwin, "One of them asked me whether I am Tiv by tribe, even though I was a Tiv, I said no, but they still injured me on my finger."

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