

GUNMEN IN ARMY UNIFORMS KILL 26 IN BENUE



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By **Ben Adaji, Cephas Iorhemen and Baba Negedu**



Gunmen in the army uniforms yesterday went berserk, killing 26 people, following an attack on Jandeikyura, a border settlement between Taraba and Benue states. The incident occurred in the wee hours of Friday in Tiv dominated villages, bringing the total number of people murdered in the area to 67. This is coming as kidnappers on Thursday night killed two policemen and abducted two newlyweds as well as 19 others in Birnin Gwari area of Kaduna State. The Benue border community had earlier been attacked on Thursday where 41 people were killed. The villages attacked were Akaanya, Kpete and Tse- Orlam.

The 'soldiers', whom Saturday Telegraph gathered were from Taraba, made incursion into the area, allegedly in search of two of their colleagues, reportedly killed by the rampaging Fulani herdsmen. Governor Samuel Ortom had confirmed the killing of an officer of the Nigerian Army by the herders and abandoned in his pool of blood.

The deceased officer, who was among the soldiers deployed in the state for peacekeeping operations, was killed at River Tyulen crossing point in Guma Local Government Area of Benue State. Sources from Ukum Local Government told Saturday Telegraph that the suspected soldiers, who were in large numbers, came in search of their missing colleagues but as they could not find the corpses resorted to indiscriminate shootings during which no fewer than 26 persons were felled. Speaking with Saturday Telegraph, an indigene of the area, who pleaded anonymity, said:

"The said soldiers came from neighbouring Taraba State in a military warfare manner and discovered that some of their people who were killed by Fulani herdsmen were still missing. "Instead of concentrating their attack in Taraba where they were supposed to station, they decided to invade Benue villages to launch the attack which led to the killing of 26 people". "As I speak with you, there is serious tension in the local government as thousands of people including women, children and old people are fleeing the area in droves and leaving their food items cultivated at the mercy of

the invaders". Another source who identified himself simply as John Alaghga, alleged that the soldiers also killed a market chief and also set ablaze church buildings at NKST Church Akaanya. Mr. Alaghga hinted that after the attack, the arsonists proceeded to Tse-Orliam and Kpete River where many refugees had run to hide and opened fire on them.

"I have been sojourning in the area for decades now but I can tell you that what I saw those people do was terrible. They were killing people like chickens and the entire area had been deserted," he said. Acting governor of the state, Engr. Benson Abounu told journalists that the government had evolved proactive measures to stem the killings. Abounu denied knowledge of the attack and killings of innocent citizens of the state, saying he had not contacted the local government chairman to brief him on the attack and killings. "What I have experienced from the 'Cat Race' had been that measures taken by the security forces had been reactionary. You hear that there was one attack or another here and there and reports were made and security forces move in, stabilise the situation and they get back and then you hear of another one.

That's how it has been going on, and it has been all reactionary." But today we held a security meeting and we decided that the best approach should be proactive; we should forestall rather than repel a situation that had already gone bad. "It is incumbent on the security forces to block all entry points where these attackers

come from so that we can be able to forestall any attack that might take place”.

The deputy governor also confirmed the killing of two people at the Agboughul community within Makurdi territory by suspected herdsmen on Thursday morning. He said as a result of the attack, security network in the state had been reviewed and expressed satisfaction with the cooperation given the government by security chiefs which he said would go a long way in bringing the situation under control.

Taraba death toll rises as women protest ‘complicity’

Meanwhile, following the recovery of additional seven more bodies, the death toll in Wednesday’s attack on a Taraba village has risen to 32 as against the initial figure of 25, earlier recorded on Thursday. This is coming as hundreds of women in Takum Local Government Area of the state yesterday staged a peaceful protest within Takum township while calling for an end to the killings as well as “army’s harassment and complicity”. A resident of the village, Hon. Orbee Uchiv, who spoke with Saturday Telegraph confirmed the figure in a telephone interview while informing that the bodies had since been buried by the community.

Uchiv, who noted that the community had been deserted following the attacks, however said there is a deployment of security personnel in the area. While informing that some of those injured are receiving

treatment at the Wukari General Hospital and other private hospitals in the area, he said:

“We conducted mass burial for the dead ones in four different graves, dug by youths”. He lamented that people in the affected villages are in need of food and other relief materials as the attackers had burnt down all their belongings, including food items. The latest incidents are coming less than 24 hours after the Nigerian Army inaugurated a probe panel to investigate a statement credited to General TY Danjuma (ret'd), in which he alleged that the armed forces were colluding with some bandits to kill people in Taraba and other parts of the country.

The protesting women who marched through major streets of Takum carrying placards with various inscriptions such as ‘stop harassing our people’, ‘we are tired of intimidation’, ‘we want to sleep with eyes closed’, among others, blocked the gate of 93 Battalion, Ada Barracks, demanding to see the Commanding Officer, Lt. Col. Ibrahim Gambari.

The leader of the protesters, Mrs. Esther Yakubu, told journalists that they were not happy with the situation and the lack of seriousness on the part of the Federal Government to end the killings. She lamented that some army personnel, particularly those of Exercise Ayem Akpatuma, had been busy harassing people in the town while armed Fulani militia kill at will.

“Last night, the army arrested our youths and we don’t know their whereabouts. We learnt they are with them in the barracks and that is why we are here to seek for their release. “Those killing us are in the bush, we want them to go and disarm them to enable us to go back to farm because rain is here. Most of our people are peasant farmers and they depend on farming to make a living, but today the Fulani militia has taken over our land and nobody dares go to the farm. “We are now at the mercy of the armed Fulani militia who have continue with their killing spree and destruction unabated,” she lamented. Yakubu who said they were told that the Commanding Officer was not in his office noted that they would continue to keep vigil as long as it takes the military authorities to attend to their demands.

The Commanding Officer, 93 Battalion, Ada Barracks, Lt. Col. Ibrahim Gambari, did not return calls or reply a text message sent to him as at the time of filing this report. However, Assistant Director of Publicity, Army Exercise Ayem Akpatuma, Major Adegoke, told journalists that he was still gathering facts about the protest and would response as soon as the facts were available but he never did at the time of filing this report.