

# Killing Fields of Benue: More questions than answers!

**T**he unmitigated, mindless massacre of defenceless citizens, precisely in Benue State in April 2023 alone, paints a dark and heart-rending picture of the gross failure of the federal and state governments on the all-important issue of security.

Precisely, that has to do with the protection of the citizens' lives which the political leaders swore to, as enshrined in Section 14 Sub-section 2(b) of the 1999 Constitution (as amended).

Coming soon after the general elections, it raises questions on the conspiracy or not of the powers that be. Perhaps, the horrifying news headlines would tell us a bit about the orgy of the killing fields that the once 'Food Basket of the Nation' has been turned into. A few of these will do.

For instance, it was reported that 'Gunmen kill at least 46 people in an attack on a rural village'. The attack took place in Umegidi, Benue State, in Otukpo LGA where the death toll rose to 52 from the initial 46 recorded on the spot. Three people had been killed in the same village a day before the massacre. That was reported on April 7, 2023.

On April 8, 2023 came another heart-jerking report with the headline: 'Armed gangs kill 74 in Nigeria's Benue State'. And on April 10, 2023 Governor Samuel Ortom openly lamented that: "At least 134 Benue State residents were killed by armed invaders in five days".

Some few days later, on April 15, 2023, to be precise, yet another haunting spectacle was reeled out as a headline. It read

that: 'No fewer than 87 people were killed in the separate attacks by Fulani militias within 48 hours'. The shocking blood-letting took place in some LGAs of the same Benue state where several kids and pregnant women were sent to their early graves!

Not done with the killing spree, a newspaper literally screamed with the lead story: "Benue Massacre: Buhari laments as 400 die in 3 weeks".

But, in all honesty we consider the situation much more daring and dire that goes beyond the president's rhetoric of verbal lamentation.

It was little of a surprise therefore, when on April 14, 2023 a pro-democracy group, that goes by the name, 'Free Nigeria Movement' described the killings in Benue State as a national disgrace. Yes, it is!

And that underscores the position of Governor Ortom's repeated call on President Muhammadu Buhari to match words with action. That is, by deploying more troops to halt the senseless killings. That was when he revealed that at least 134 people have been killed by armed invaders within five days in separate attacks on villages in Otukpo, Apa and Guma local government areas

of the state.

Governor Ortom's clarion call on President Buhari to walk the talk came to a terrible head, or so we thought, on January 11, 2018. Buhari was conspicuously absent on that unforgettable Black Thursday in Nigeria's chequered history

when 73 bodies of victims of Fulani herdsmen attack at Guma and Logo LGAs of Benue State were buried in a mass burial on a site at the Industrial Layout along Naka Road in Makurdi, the state capital. But the president chose to share a post on his official twitter page congratulating the winner of his 2017 greeting card competition!

Such a display of scarce regard for the protection of human life got

many concerned Nigerians angry. In fact, they used that opportunity to call on him to do the needful, to ensure the immediate arrest and prosecution of the herdsmen involved in the killings, as well as pronounce herdsmen as a terrorist group. But he did not heed to that call of reasoning. Surprising, is it not?

Of course, it is and has remained so even when the Miyetti Allah Cattle Breeders Association of

**Why, for instance, are the killers fighting against the Benue State government's anti-grazing law which forbids herdsmen from roaming the farms with their cattle?**

Nigeria (MACBAN) in Benue condemned the killings in the state.

According to the state secretary of MACBAN, Ibrahim Galma, who spoke on behalf of the association, said the killings were perpetrated by bad elements that were bent on destabilising the peace of the state.

He called on President Buhari to ensure that security agents apprehend the killers of Benue people so that the victims would get justice. But the perpetrators of the killings of armless farmers still walk our streets as free men and keep killing more Benue farmers.

The unanswered questions remain on the front burner of public concern.

Why, for instance, are the killers fighting against the Benue State government's anti-grazing law which forbids herdsmen from roaming the farms with their cattle? Even as hard as it might seem to believe, is there an agenda, or conspiracy to forcefully take over the Benue people's fertile farmlands by the Fulani herdsmen? And shocking as it may sound, could there be a sinister motive for ethnic cleansing?

To put the doubters in brighter light the Federal Government through the military should send more soldiers and deploy adequate logistics to protect the hapless, peace-loving people of Benue State from the hunting hands of their marauders. The incoming government must not allow a repeat of this heinous crime. Not just against the people of Benue State, but Nigerians and humanity at large.