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[Articles](#)

[HOME](#) > [NEWS](#)

15 Killed as Fulani Herdsmen Ambush Suswam's Convoy

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Governor Dr Gabriel Suswam

Gemade raises the alarm over killings
Omololu Ogunmade and George Okoh

The incidences of unrest in Benue State came to a head when the Benue State Governor Dr Gabriel Suswam escaped death by the whiskers yesterday when his convoy was ambushed by suspected Fulani herdsmen at Tse Akenyi in Guma Local Government Area of Benue State.

The governor who led a team of security men including the Police, Civil Defence Army and the State Security Service (SSS) to take an assessment of the destruction caused in the area by the Fulani herdsmen last week ran into the same herdsmen who opened fire at the governor and his entourage when he made a stop over to assess some houses that were recently burnt at Tse Akenyi.

Surprisingly the incident occurred after a detachment of the Army in the governor's convoy pulled out following a directive that they should not go beyond Tse Ukpan. The army detachment left despite a plea by the governor.

The rampaging herdsmen who had earlier at the early hours of the morning destroyed over 72 villages and killed 25 residents in Ukpan, near Daudu were repelled by security forces in the convoy of the governor.

A visibly angry and surprised Suswam was forcefully led back into his car by his security detail.

Meanwhile, over fifty thousand displaced people from the affected area have moved enmass to neighbouring Makurdi town where they are now seeking refuge.

The situation is generating tension among the people especially as many of the displaced people are now leaving in bushes without shelter and protection.

Some of the victims told THISDAY that they have had no access to food and medication since the latest crises began. Meanwhile, the senator representing Benue North-east senatorial district in the Senate, Senator Barnabas Gemade, yesterday raised the alarm over the incessant attacks and killings of the people of Tiv and Idoma ethnic groups in Benue State, saying the trend would destabilise Nigeria if it is not urgently stopped.

Gemade who alleged that the attackers hailed from neighbouring African countries of Chad, Mali and Cameroun, alleged that they were hired to destabilise the country.

The senator told journalists in Abuja yesterday that most of the attackers were not herdsmen as often claimed, but were rather miscreants with the motive of causing internal crisis in the country especially in the Middle Belt region.

He said: "I think they really want to see some war fought in the Middle Belt part of the country which is a very big shame. Otherwise, how can you see an insurgency taking place in the middle of the country and the people who are doing this are coming from neighbouring countries such as Chad, Mali, Cameroun, Congo and many others.

"How did they pass through all the land that they passed through before getting to Benue which is right in the middle of the country? I think it is a matter which has to be looked at very critically. The law enforcement agencies have to take it upon themselves to look into this matter."

Gemade, who said the development was worrisome and required immediate attention from the federal government, called for investigation with a view to bringing those behind the attacks to book.

He said: "Well it is a matter that needs very urgent action by a combination of all the security agencies in this country to fish out the people behind this. The TIV and Idoma people are not the only people who have fertile lands in this country.

"There are many other tribes living in the Benue region where the land is very fertile and full of grass for animal. But why are they not fighting those tribes? Why are they insisting on fighting the people who are in Benue state?

"That tells you clearly that there is a motive behind it and this motive is not just addressed to the people living on fertile land but against a system and that system is against the peaceful existence of Nigeria and the peaceful performance of the government of the nation at this time. And I think the law enforcement agencies should take this seriously."

He added: "As political leaders, we are talking about it. We are calling on people in this country not to allow our people take laws into their hands. You know that every community in Nigeria can raise an army if they want to do so and it is not right for us to begin to raise an army for ourselves and that is why the national defence forces should do their jobs.

"That was curious in the matter was that when you check these invasions by these Fulani herdsmen even though we all know they are not all herdsmen, it is a mixture of miscreants from various parts of the Africa who are coming to cause this disturbance.

"We are telling the government that they must raise a defence force that will come in and raid these areas and get rid of these people. We are also calling on people in these affected areas to be vigilant and they should not aid and abate those coming into their lands to go and attack the people.

"We are not the only ones living on fertile lands; so why are they not attacking the other people? Let them not push us to a point where we have to raise an army."

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