

NEWS

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Gunmen Kill 23 Persons in Benue, Katsina

Francis Sardauna in Katsina
and George Okoh in Makurdi

Gunmen have killed 23 persons in Benue and Katsina States in attacks on two local government areas in both states.

While 11 persons were yesterday morning killed in Okokolo village by gunmen from Abughe village in Agatu Local Government Area of Benue State, bandits reportedly killed at least 11 persons in nine communities of Kankara Local Government Area of Katsina State.

The gunmen attacked Okokolo while the locals went to churches.

Several houses were also said to have been burnt down while many people were reportedly still missing at the time of this report.

A native of Okokolo village, John Ikwalono, told journalists that there were no prior issues between the communities before the attack.

"This barbaric, unwarranted and inhuman attack occurred even when series of peace meetings have been called. Just few days before these attacks, Agbaduma community and Abughe community, it was gathered, signed peace agreement and promised to remain peaceful and ensure that there would be no further problem among them.

Ikwalono listed those who are confirmed dead from Okokolo to include Mr. Baba Odoje, Mr. Stanichu Magaji (a retired military officer), Mr. Oloche Ochiabo (Kaddo), Adehi Imalkwu and Mr. Maji Baba.

Others are Ngbede Ibrahim, Bello-Gene-Galib, Mr. Ekoja,

Adams Dogara (Pastor Dogara's son) and one Francis Idu's wife and her two children.

While noting that bodies of some persons who were suspected to have been killed in the attack were yet to be found, Ikwalono, a former supervisory councillor of the council, said so many persons, including Mrs. Mary Adakonye, a health worker, who sustained bullet wounds in the attack, were currently receiving treatment at different hospitals in Agatu.

Ikwalono, who lamented the development, said the situation, if not properly handled, was capable of destroying the entire Agatu.

According to him, "And then there might be no place to call Agatu in the nearest future. God forbid it anyway, but this is my candid advice to our leaders.

"I appreciate all those with genuine intentions to bring peace to the area, but those instigating crisis in the area shall know no peace for the rest of their lives."

When contacted, the Caretaker Chairman of Agatu Local Government Council, Hon Usman Alifu, who confirmed the report, said he had directed soldiers to the area to deal decisively with the perpetrators of the crime and arrest them.

"We are on top of the situation now. Thank you for your genuine concern and your tireless efforts," he said.

Similarly, the Benue State Chairman of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), Sir John Ngbede, in a telephone conversation, expressed bitterness over the unfortunate situation.

Ngbede, who is an indigene of Agatu, said he had already informed the caretaker chairman to make sure soldiers arrest everyone involved in the attack to serve as a deterrent to others.

"Even if it is a stone you find there, don't spare anyone, pick them up and deal with them mercilessly," the visibly angry PDP chairman said.

Efforts to get the reaction of the police were not successful at the time of filing this report as phone calls put to the state Police Public Relations Officer (PPRO), DSP Catherine Anene, were neither picked nor returned.

Meanwhile, armed bandits have reportedly killed at least 11 persons in nine communities of Kankara Local Government Area

of Katsina State.

The communities invaded by the hoodlums include Pauwa, Katoge, Danhayi, Gidan Guga, Kaurawa, Jan Bago, Kadanya, Gidan Kwaki and Lambar Kantoma.

The fresh onslaught on the communities, according to local sources, occurred last Saturday at about 6:23 p.m. when the hoodlums numbering about 70 invaded the communities on motorcycles.

But police in the state gave the number of those killed as seven, and blamed members of the communities for not informing the security operatives on time.

Confirming the development to THISDAY yesterday, a staff of the council who pleaded anonymity, said: "The bandits attacked nine villages and killed 11 persons

yesterday (Saturday) evening and raped many women in the communities.

The source added that many women and children were declared missing after the invasion, saying those injured were receiving treatment in different hospitals in the state.

When contacted, the Katsina State police spokesman, SP Gambo Isah, confirmed the incident, saying seven persons were killed and two are currently receiving treatment.

"The bandits came with more than 100 motorcycles, and each of the motorcycles carried three persons armed with AK47. We got the information late, and already the bandits had laid ambush for the security operatives," he said.

The police spokesman added

that security personnel had been deployed to the villages to restore peace, while the hoodlums were being trailed to their hideouts by the police and army to arrest them.

Isah appealed to residents of the state to always help the police with positive information on criminals' hideouts for urgent interventions.

Disturbed by the carnage, hundreds of aggrieved youths at the weekend besieged Kankara town and blocked major roads leading to the council for about three hours.

The protesters alleged that both the state and federal governments were not doing enough to address banditry, kidnapping and other crimes in the state.



WORTHY HONOUR