

As ISWAP Intensifies Attacks, Buratai Charges Troops to Remain Focused

July 20, 2019 6:39 am



• **Terror group attacks aid workers' convoy, kills one, abducts 6 others**

By Kingsley Nwezeh in Abuja and Michael Olugbode in Maiduguri

Suspected members of Islamic State of West Africa Province (ISWAP) have continued their onslaught in the North-east by attacking a convoy of aid workers in Borno State, killing one person and abducting six others.

Also yesterday, the military authorities confirmed the killing of an army colonel, a captain and three soldiers during a fierce encounter with insurgents in Yobe State on Wednesday, with the Chief of Army Staff, Lt. General Tukur Buratai, reiterating the commitment of the Army to prosecute the war against insurgency to a logical conclusion, despite the setbacks.

A statement signed by Country Director of Action Against Hunger, Shashwat Saraf said the attack on the aid workers' convoy occurred on Thursday on the road to Damasak, Borno State.

The country director lamented that one of the drivers was killed, while one Action Against Hunger staff, two of the drivers and three health workers were abducted.

He said: "We are deeply saddened by this tragic incident as these are colleagues dedicated to providing life-saving assistance to individuals and families affected by the ongoing

humanitarian crisis in the north east of Nigeria.

"We are very concerned and want to ensure that they are safe and can be reunited with their families.

"Millions of people in need of humanitarian assistance in north east Nigeria receive the essential services required for their survival, especially women and children.

"We express our deepest condolences to the family of our driver and we extend our support to the families of our missing colleagues as well as others affected by this incident. We appeal to the media and the public to desist from circulating unverified information about the situation above."

Similarly, the United Nations Humanitarian Coordinator in Nigeria, Edward Kallon said in a statement that "his thoughts and that of the humanitarian community are with the victims and their families."

He said: "I am deeply disturbed by reports of an incident involving aid workers from International NGOs in northern Borno State. As details are still coming in and information has yet to be confirmed, the humanitarian community in Nigeria is concerned about the safety of our ACF colleague, partners and contractors involved in the attack against an aid convoy reported on 18 July on the Gubio-Damasak road.

"They devote their lives to helping vulnerable people and communities in an area heavily affected by violence. I call on all who may have influence to do everything they can to keep them unharmed and work towards their safe return."

Kallon however said: "Out of respect and consideration for the families, the humanitarian community in Nigeria is also asking the general public, including the media to refrain from sharing any unconfirmed information. The spread of misinformation may put the concerned aid workers at risk and jeopardise their way back to safety.

"This attack occurred only a couple weeks before the ongoing crisis affecting the states of Borno, Adamawa and Yobe enters its tenth year. Today, 7.1 million people still need humanitarian assistance. Violence, insecurity and inaccessibility to remote areas of Borno State continue to hamper the response to urgent needs.

"These acts of violence affect the very individuals, families, and communities that we support, and deprive vulnerable people of vital services."

He advised that all parties should protect and facilitate the delivery of aid.

"Despite constraints, the humanitarian community remains committed to doing its utmost to provide lifesaving assistance and help the people in north-east Nigeria rebuild their lives," he assured.

Army Chief Confirms Killing of Colonel, Captain, Three Soldiers; Says Army Undeterred

Meanwhile, in spite of the loss of officers and men to insurgent attacks, Buratai, yesterday reiterated the commitment of the Army to prosecute the war against insurgency to a logical conclusion as military authorities yesterday confirmed the killing of an army colonel, a captain and three soldiers during a fierce encounter with insurgents in Yobe State.

But other military sources said the officers and 15 other soldiers were killed. The death toll in the latest attack brings to 46, the number of soldiers killed within two months by the combined forces of the Islamic State for West Africa Province (ISWAP) and Boko Haram in the North-east.

Buratai, while commiserating with the families of the fallen heroes, reiterated that "personnel of the Nigerian Army will never be deterred in the ongoing noble and patriotic fight against terrorism and insurgency in the North East".

He commended the efforts of the entire troops in the theatre and charged them to remain focused, highly committed and professional in the discharge of their constitutional roles.

A statement issued by the Deputy Director, Public Relations, Operation Lafiya Dole, Col. Ado Isa on the killing of the officers and men in Yobe State, said troops of 212 Battalion deployed at Forward Operating Base (FOB) Jakana, Wednesday eliminated many fighters of terrorist groups, Boko Haram/ISWAP when they attempted to infiltrate their base while in search of logistics.

He said: "The terrorists came at about 1845 hours in seven gun trucks and fought fiercely to infiltrate the camp but the attack was thwarted with heavy fire and bombardment by the gallant and patriotic troops who were vigilant and battle ready.

"The terrorists couldn't bear the fire power any longer after losing significant number of both equipment and personnel in an exchange of fire. They lost initiative and withdrew in disarray along the Benisheikh-Damaturu axis, abandoning a damaged utility gun truck which was earmarked to convey looted items."

Col Isa said troops immediately followed in hot pursuit and captured one anti-aircraft gun, two Rocket- Propelled Grenade (RPG) tubes, two AK 47 rifles, 15 machine gun rounds and 12 AK 47 NATO rounds.

"Sadly, a colonel and a captain as well as three soldiers on transit from Maiduguri to Damaturu ran into an ambush staged by the routed/fleeing terrorists from the Jakana axis which led to their unfortunate death.

"The Chief of Army Staff (COAS), Lieutenant General Tukur Yusuf Buratai while commiserating with the families of the fallen heroes reiterated that 'Personnel of the Nigerian Army will never be deterred in the ongoing noble and patriotic fight against terrorism and insurgency in the North East."

He further commended the efforts of the entire troops in the theatre and charged them to remain focused, highly committed and professional in the discharge of their constitutional roles.

"The sacrifices of the fallen heroes in the ongoing fight against terrorism and insurgency is no doubt painful to all, but that will further spur us to do more to ensure that our country remain secured, peaceful and free from terrorist activities for the overall interest of the nation," Buratai said.

Military authorities have continued to insist that the war against insurgency was over and that the insurgents were defeated but terrorists follow up such pronouncements with lethal attacks.

The newly promoted General Officer Commanding (GOC) 7 Division, Nigerian Army, Major General Abdulmalik Biu, boasted on return to Maiduguri after he was decorated with a new rank that insurgents should celebrate his promotion by laying down their arms.

"The promotion I was told was as a result of all the efforts and successes we recorded in defeating Boko Haram. Our appreciation will, therefore, be incomplete without calling on the remnants Boko Haram to join in celebrating me by laying down their arms unconditionally as quickly as possible for peace to reign.

"Then, I will have a great sense of fulfillment. "But where some of them decide not to do so, I want to assure them that I have returned to Maiduguri more reinvigorated, well energized", he revealed and declared: "I have my eyes very wide and ever prepared to go after those that are adamant.

The GOC, who was one of the senior officers granted accelerated promotion by President Muhammadu Buhari, said his promotion would enable him redouble his efforts.

"This opportunity given to me by way of elevating me to this rank will certainly make me redouble my efforts toward ensuring that we achieve our desired goals. I want to thank President Muhammadu Buhari, the Commander-in-Chief for finding me worthy.

"I equally want to thank the Chief of Army Staff, Lt.-Gen. Tukur Burutai, who put in all his time and support to ensure that we key into his vision and policies. I owe him a lot of gratitude. Today, I am celebrated not only by officers and men of the Division and the Nigerian army, but I believe by all Nigerians," he said.