

NEWS

Gunmen Kill Church Leader, Three Others in Nasarawa

Igbawase Ukumba in Lafia

Unknown gunmen, suspected to be Fulani militia, yesterday invaded Abebe community in Keana Local Government Area of Nasarawa State, killing a Catholic Church leader, Mr. Augustine Avertse, and three others during the invasion.

The gunmen, who were said to have been armed with sophisticated weapons, invaded the community at about 10 p.m., and shot sporadically, forcing inhabitants of the community to scamper for safety.

One of the victims, Avertse, the church leader of Saint Augustine's Catholic Church in Abebe, with his father, Avertse Akpa'am, was reportedly shot

at close range while trying to escape into a nearby bush.

Also killed during the attack were Uwongul John Akodi and another who was simply identified as Monday, said to be a visitor to the community.

However, Mr. Vitalis Adam and Friday Gboko escaped with varying degrees of gunshot injuries and are currently receiving treatment at the General Hospital in Obi.

One of the survivors, Adam, who spoke with THISDAY on his hospital bed in Obi, claimed that the attack was unprovoked as there had never been any form of misunderstanding between members of the community and the Fulani herdsmen living in the area.

Another survival, who narrowly escaped death, asserted that the gunmen might have been on a mission to rub a member of the attacked community of the over N200,000. 00 realised from the sales of some farm produce that took place in the afternoon of that fateful day.

"But the confusion is that if the attackers were on a mission to rub, why didn't take away anything, including the monies

found in the pockets of some of their victims?

"I think the incident is a sign that another round of crises between herders and Tiv farmer in the southern senatorial zone of the state is about to commence if not nipped in the bud," he said.

President of the Tiv Youth Organisation in Nasarawa State, Peter Ahemba, confirmed the incident to journalists in Lafia, alleging that the 'unprovoked'

attack was a calculated attempt by enemies of peace to cause another round of crisis within the state.

According to him, "It is unfortunate that while the state Governor Abdullahi Sule-led administration is working hard to ensure a peaceful state, some selfish individuals were working hard to sabotage the government's efforts."

The youth president, however, commended the prompt

response of the authorities of Keana Local Government Area, security operatives, traditional leaders in the area, just as he called on the Tiv youths to remain calm in the face of the provocation.

When contacted, the state Police Public Relations Officer (PPRO), Ramhan Nansel, claimed that the Command was yet to be briefed on the incident, as well as at the time of filing this report.

