

Suspected Herdsmen Kill Four Persons in Benue

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- **State govt, Army disagree over military operation**

Four persons were wednesday killed in Waya, Moon district of Kwande Local Government Area of Benue State when marauding herdsmen launched an attack on the area.

Confirming the report, Public Relations Officer, Benue State Police Command, DSP Sewuese Anene, said the incident occurred on Tuesday when the herdsmen attack the local community by the river bank and shot sporadically killing four people while many others sustained injuries.

The renewed attack has generated hot argument between Benue State Government and the military special operation in the state.

The member of the House of Representatives from Kwande/Ushongo Federal Constituency in Benue State, Hon. Bob Tyough, condemned the attack, saying he was unhappy that the Commander of Operation Whirl Stroke (OPWS), Major General Adeyemi Yekini, claimed in an interview with journalists that his team has ended insecurity in Benue State while the killings continued unabated.

"While not taking anything away from the commitment and gallantry of the military in our state, particularly troops of OPWS, I wish to raise objection to the swooping claim by Major

General Yekini which tends to sell the impression that total peace has returned to Benue State," Tyough added.

He pointed out that Yekini's claims that Benue people are no longer under attacks was not true and maintained that four persons were killed and many others injured at Waya community in Jato-Aka, Kwande Local Government Area on Tuesday.

"The OPWS Commander's assertion that his job does not include arresting cows on the streets is also misleading, because herdsmen invade our communities with sophisticated weapons and kill innocent people," Tyough noted.

Tyough, in a statement, observed that if attacks did not fall within the mandate of the military operation, then, he wondered what else was their mandate.

The lawmaker stated that he read the comments credited to Governor Samuel Ortom to which Major General Yekini reacted, saying he saw nothing strange in what the governor said other than the well known fact that the security agencies needed support.

He explained that the governor's statement implied that as much as the military operation has done well, a lot more needed to be done to ensure that Benue communities were safer and people could return to their ancestral homes.

"In my opinion, Major General Yekini ought to have seen Governor Ortom's call as a voice of support; and his team has no doubt done a commendable job even as the personnel are also aware that their capacity needs to be strengthened to enable them do better," he added.

He explained that Kwande Local Government Area has only 35 police personnel. He queried thus: "How would 35 police men guarantee the safety of lives and property in a local government?"

In his reaction, Yekini said his troops are neither overwhelmed nor overstretched by the security challenges in the three states of their operation.

Yekini stated that OPWS has carried out operations in Benue, Taraba and Nasarawa states in July 2018 following daunting security challenges occasioned by the activities of armed herdsmen and armed militias in these states.

He added that the troops have been working round the clock to keep all armed elements away from the three states.

"We are not overstretched or overwhelmed. No, we are not. Every military operation has a mandate and we believe we have substantially fulfilled our mandate not just in Benue but also in Nasarawa and Taraba states.

"We know how we met Benue State in particular when we got here. The security situation then was characterised by mass killings by armed herdsmen and other acts brigandage by warlords such as Gana and Ojoundu who carved out parts of the state for themselves," he said.

Yekinni said within a short period of operation, OPWS succeeded in flushing out all these criminals and also curtailed the activities of armed herdsmen which had now been reduced to occasional skirmishes with troops.

The commander said his troops have so far recovered close to 300 assorted weapons and thousands of rounds of ammunition in the three states as well as destroyed all identified militia camps especially in Benue State.

"We made it possible for Benue State Government to reassert political authority over places like Katsina Ala, Gbise, Gawa and so many other rural communities in Logo, Ukum and Kwande Local Government Areas which were hitherto being controlled by some of these warlords.

"We assisted greatly in preserving Benue as the food basket of the nation in spite of all odds. Thanks to OPWS, Benue today is exporting trailer loads of foodstuff to other parts of the country almost on daily basis thereby boosting the state's IGR," he said.

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