

## How 26 persons were butchered by invading mercenaries

BY PETER DURU,  
MAKURDI

**T**HE persistent crisis between the Hausa Fulani herdsmen and their host native Tiv community took a horrifying dimension few days ago when a group of Fulani herdsmen stormed Mbagwen community in Guma Local Government Area of Benue State, killing and maiming any living thing in sight.

The renewed crisis which is coming few weeks after a similar skirmish in Gwer West local government of the state, has left over eight thousand persons homeless with no source of livelihood as houses, huts and food storage barns were also destroyed by the invaders.

Worst hit by the carnage were women and children most of whom have taken shelter at nearby forests and bushes.

The invaders who were suspected to be mercenaries marched from Tse Abatse Mbabegh all through to Tse Joo a distance of over 30 kilometres without any resistance from the native Tiv inhabitants.

And at the end of the invasion, lives, houses, huts, economic trees, farm seedlings and harvests were devastated, burnt and destroyed.

No fewer than 26 persons were confirmed dead by one of the victims of the bloodbath at Tse Abase Terver King who claimed that he lost his younger brother in the attack.

It was also gathered that in the aftermath of the onslaught, many are still missing, while some are unaccounted for till date.

As at now the only high ranking government official to visit the ravaged communities is the Director General of the National Agency for Food and Drug Administration and Control NAFDAC, Dr. Paul Orhii who took newsmen on a humanitarian visit to the devastated communities.

Dr. Orhii who was moved by the level of devastation in the community donated 1,500 bags of rice to the people at Yogbo town, with a promised to muster assistance from public spirited individuals and other agencies in order to assuage their suffering.

He also undertook a

comprehensive on-the-spot assessment of the devastated communities and called on public-spirited individuals and organisations to come to the aid of the helpless people who are faced with possible outbreak of water borne diseases.

The NAFDAC Director General who extended similar gesture to the displaced persons in Gwer West Local Government Area of the state after a similar attack by herdsmen few months ago, implored the parties to observe restraint and respect the sanctity of human life.

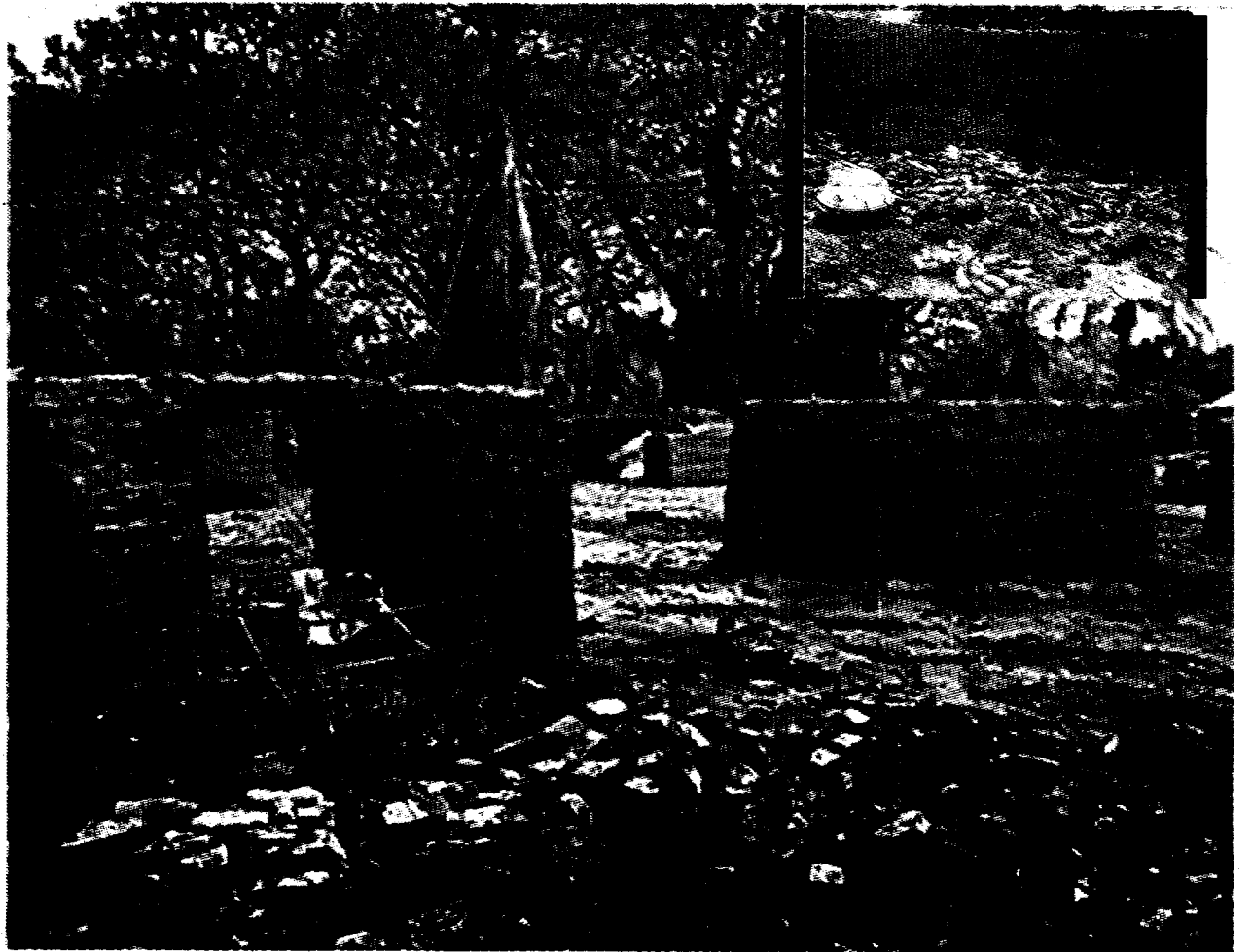
He pointed out that: "Nigerians must learn to live together in peace as a people bounded in love by God irrespective of our socio-religious background; because that is the only way we can make progress as a nation", he added.

Represented by his Special Assistant, Dr. James Mbachiantim, he commended the proactive steps taken by the state government to stem the bloodbath just as he implored the people to desist from any form of reprisal attacks on the herdsmen.

Receiving the relief

**It was gathered that most of the victims of the attack were accorded a mass burial in a mass grave after their unidentifiable remains were found few days after the attack**

materials on behalf of the displaced people, the chairman of the Relief Materials Distribution Committee, Mr. Ignatius Tsa, regretted that youths, women and children were hacked down with machetes by the rampaging herdsmen who also destroyed farm yields and seedlings of the farming populace.



*"Remains of houses burnt down by the invaders. INSET: One of the yam barns destroyed during the attack"*

"The situation is really pathetic because most of the affected people, apart from being displaced can hardly feed themselves," he added.

It was gathered from the Relief Materials Distribution Committee Chairman that most of the victims of the attack were accorded a mass burial in a mass grave in Yogbo after their unidentifiable remains were found in the bushes few days after the attack.

Surviving victims of the invasion were still in shock of the nightmare that greeted them just a day to the last gubernatorial election in the state.

For Simon Ternongo of Tse Joo village who lost his wife and two sons in the crisis, life would amount to nothing if the perpetrators of the atrocious crime on his family were not brought to justice. Ternong recounted that the aggressors marched into the village from neighbouring Nasarawa State "armed with guns and machetes with which they slaughtered all those that were killed". According to him: "It was around 5:am when we were woken from

sleep by heavy, trampling feet and yelling in the neighbourhood. When most of us came out of our houses we discovered that the Fulani herdsmen have taken over our entire community, burning and killing anything in sight. "Our houses, huts, farm seedling, food and economic trees were all destroyed in one fell swoop. In the mist of that confusion, one was left with no other option but to run for safety, it was in this confusion that they killed my wife and two sons".

While fighting back his tears, Ternongo disclosed that the slain members of his family were butchered and dismembered by the mercenaries who also ensured that all his farm produce and household items were not spared in the vicious attack.

"What they have done to our community is highly condemnable, because we could not imagine what prompted the provocation and resort to violent attack and killing of women and children in such a manner," the bereaved Ternongo lamented.

At Tse Abate village, 23-year-old Tertim Kuma

recounted how his elder brother, James, was murdered by the invaders.

It was all tale of woes by a community where relics of the dastardly assault adorn the landscape of a hitherto peaceful town.

According to him, they had all escaped from the invaders into the forest but unknown to them the mercenaries had caught up with his elder brother. They chopped off his two legs and his head. "I cannot understand the motive of the attackers; we cannot understand the reason for the bloodbath and the wanton destruction which was actually unprovoked," he said.

It was gathered that the invaders had intended marching to Yogbo town, a bustling community but had to beat a retreat when they met a stiff resistance from the inhabitants of the town. It was gathered that the Fulani invasion may have been prompted by an alleged attack and killing of some of their cattle which had grazed on farmlands outside routes approved by the communal leaders in the affected

communities.

It was also reliably gathered that most of the village heads in the affected communities have absconded from their communities for fear of being manhandled by their subjects who accused them of collecting gratification from the herdsmen in order to allow them easy grazing passage in the community which according to them had resulted in the bloodbath.

Meanwhile, a combined force of the Police and the Nigerian Army has been drafted into Yogbo town and around the volatile villages to check possible outbreak of another round of violence in Guma. This recent attack on the Mbagwen Tiv community by Fulani herdsmen has brought to the fore the dire need for a well mapped out grazing route to cater for herdsmen and their cattle in order to avert future occurrence of carnage of this nature in any part of the country.

CONTACT: mykeboh@yahoo.co.uk 08051100182