

BREAKING NEWS

TRANSLATE:::

36 feared killed as Fulani herdsmen strike in Benue

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By Peter Duru, Makurdi

No fewer than 36 persons were, yesterday, feared killed while seven villages were overrun by suspected Fulani herdsmen in an outbreak of fighting between the invaders and native farmers in Agatu Local Government Area of Benue State.

The massacre came barely two days after some assailants struck at Ikpele and Okpopolo communities in the state, killing seven farmers and displacing over 6,000 inhabitants.

Sunday Vanguard gathered, at the time of this report, that heavy fighting was still going on between the warring parties who only recently engaged in bloodletting.

A native of one of the affected communities, who escaped the assault, narrated that “they (Fulani herdsmen) took us unawares this time; they invaded our villages from Loco in Nasarawa State and Omola Local Government Area of Kogi State.

The victim told Sunday Vanguard in Makurdi, Benue State capital, yesterday, “But as I speak to you, well over 36 persons must have been killed on our own side while many are still missing; the situation on ground is horrible because fighting is still going on while women, children and the elderly are fleeing to safety.”

When contacted, the Benue State Commissioner for Works and Transport, John Ngbede, who is an indigene of the area, confirmed the massacre.

‘Boiling’

Ngbede said, “Heavy fighting is still going on in Agatu. The attackers are burning down houses, farmlands, economic trees and many are also being killed but i cannot confirm the number of deaths. All I can say is that Agatu is boiling”.

Member representing Agatu Constituency at the Benue State House of Assembly, Sule Audu, also confirmed that seven villages had been attacked while many were killed and several persons missing.

According to him, the villages under siege include Ello, Okpagabi, Ogwule-Ankpa, Ogbangede, Ekwo, Enogaje and Okpanchenyi.

While lamenting inadequate security presence on ground in the affected communities, the lawmaker said, “As I speak to you, only few soldiers are on ground who don’t even have mobility to match the strength of the invaders.

The attackers are over 5,000 spread across all the communities and unleashing terror on my people without resistance.

“They are moving towards Oshugbudu now and I ask, what can less than 40 soldiers on ground do to stop armed invaders numbering up to 5,000?”

‘Count us out of attack’

In his reaction, however, the state Secretary of Myetti-Allah Cattle Breeders Association of Nigeria (MACBAN), Alh. Garus Gololo, denied that the invaders were Fulani herdsmen .

Gololo said, “I don’t know which people are attacking Agatu in recent times. We don’t have any Fulani person currently residing in the area and, as I have said earlier, we need peace; so it couldn’t have been my people”.

When contacted, the Benue State Police Public Relations Officer, PPRO, Deputy Suprentendent, Daniel Ezeala, confirmed the escalating fighting in Agatu.

He said, “Five Agatu villages are currently under heavy attack. We can’t confirm the exact number of casualties or deaths for now, but I can assure you that a combined team of the police and army personnel have already been drafted to the affected communities to arrest the situation, and the situation is under control.”