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Tears flow freely after fresh onslaught by Fulani herdsmen

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By Marie-Therese Nanlong, Jos

FOR more than a decade, Plateau State, the “Home of Peace and Tourism”, has been plagued by series of violent attacks and bomb blasts which have left thousands dead, property worth billions of Naira destroyed and relationships among people severed.

These attacks which abated in the State capital Jos, have however persisted in the hinterlands with Riyom, Barkin Ladi, Jos South and Bokkos Local Government Areas being the latest targets.

Residents of Riyom, one of the worst affected council areas, who had in the last three months witnessed relative peace, were caught off-guard when the monster reared its ugly head again. The latest attacks which came when the residents were getting used to the new-found serenity, left the people disillusioned.



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Herdsmen... as death merchants

The attacks which occurred simultaneously in six villages early Friday morning, were perhaps the most gory. The residents who alleged that the attackers were Fulanis, claimed that they killed a two-week-old baby. A pregnant woman who was due for delivery was also burnt to death.

The attackers who stormed the Sharubutu, Gyen, Dung, Fang, Lwa and Dyang villages when the inhabitants were fast asleep, allegedly killed 16 people and burnt property, including six cars and eight motorcycles. Also destroyed were more than 40 houses as well as over 20 farmlands of pepper, cabbage, maize and vegetables.

Among the dead were five members of the family of one Pastor Jonathan, the presbyter in charge of the local Church, COCIN. The names of the children were given as Goodluck, Grace, Mary, Sandra and their two-week-old baby. Also killed was an 80- year old grandmother, Mary Dauda and her grandchild, Jummai Dauda, 14.

Lasting mpeace

Others who alleged lost their lives included Dalyop Gorow, Danyam Davou, Ayuba Danjuma, Homsarah Danjuma, a pregnant woman whose name could not be ascertained and some others whose identities were not established at the time of this report.

Speaking with Vanguard Features VF, the Chairperson of Riyom Local Government Area, Mrs. Josephine Piyo said she was saddened by the development which occurred inspite of efforts to restore lasting peace in the area.

“I got a call at about 3am that there were simultaneous attacks on six villages of my local government and that the people were running for safety despite the sporadic gunshots all over the place.

Many people were killed including one foetus at full term. The mother was burnt to death and the completely formed baby exposed. Some bodies are yet to be recovered and the Special Task Force, STF, posts were also burnt down,” she lamented.

Mrs. Piyo commended the bravery of the security personnel who rose to the task adding: “The security personnel tried but I guess they might have been outnumbered and overwhelmed. I sympathise with them as they also lost a personnel.”

She said she will not be deterred by this ugly development and will continue to work for lasting peace to be restored in the area. The Council boss appealed to detractors to give peace a chance so that development can come to the area.

Majority Leader and member representing Riyom Constituency in the Plateau State House of Assembly, Mr. Daniel Dem said the attacks were carried out by Fulani herdsmen who also burnt houses, including that of the late Senator Gyang Dantong.

Dem added that there was rumour about an impending attack on the communities about a week before the incident but no one believed them because of series of meetings which had been held and the fragile peace which residents were enjoying.

He said normalcy has been restored as a result of the intervention of the operatives of the STF, but called for adequate security measures in the affected communities to enable the villagers continue with their normal activities.

Mr Dem also called on the National Emergency Management Agency, NEMA, to assist the victims with relief materials to enable them cushion the effects of the attacks.

Similarly, the Councillor representing Sharubutu Ward, Dauda Dim alleged that 19 people were killed including two Fulani men who were exchanging fire with the soldiers. According to him, many people were also injured while eight persons are still missing.

He further alleged that the attackers went away with the missing people and appealed to security agencies to track them down and rescue the people.

Apart from the burning of houses, shops and foodstuff barns, the Counsellor disclosed that one Emmanuel Pam who was

returning to Sharubutu from Angwan Wereng on a motorbike was ambushed and killed on Saturday evening.

He appealed for the intervention of relevant agencies in the provision of foodstuff to the affected villagers who are “living in fear and hunger”.

The Councillor called on the security agents to patrol the routes from Shendam, Bokokos, Barkin Ladi to Riyom in Plateau State and Southern part of Kaduna State which the militia always pass through.

The spokesman of the STF, Capt. Ikedichi Iweha, confirmed that “six villages were attacked simultaneously, including our guard locations in those villages”.

“The attacks started around 3.30am and at the end, eight community members lost their lives. A soldier was killed and three attacking militias also lost their lives. Some injured persons have been taken to hospital and normalcy has been restored to the areas,” he said.

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