

# VANGUARD

## Nigeria: Benue Community Calls for Help

By Peter Duru

Markudi — Just when it seemed that the lingering bloody conflict between Benue farmers and Fulani herdsmen had at last been contained, the crisis resurfaced and escalated in parts of the state, especially in Agatu and Logo local government areas of the state. As at last count, well over 300 persons lost their lives in the last few weeks, with hundreds of houses and property destroyed in the protracted crisis that seemed to have defied all genuine efforts

The crisis in Agatu Local Government Area particularly came to a head few days ago when close to 40 persons were allegedly killed by the marauders that also led to the sacking of over 18 villages and communities, while several houses, huts and farmland were also razed.

At the moment, virtually all communities and villages in Agatu are somewhat ravaged and are in ruins with thousands of internally displaced persons, in refuge in Apa Local Government Area and nearby Kogi State.

Badly hit by the unending crisis were women and children who are forced to live at the mercy of the invaders who ransack the besieged communities and resist resistance from the locals.

### Volatile communities

Bothered by the ordeal of the victims, the Senate President, Senator David Mark, few days ago paid a surprise visit to the volatile communities to comfort them and also donate relief materials to the victims. Addressing some of the IDPs at Obagaji the Agatu local government headquarters, Mark stated that the Government had put measures in place to stem the crisis.

Mark urged the feuding parties to sheathe their sword and embrace peace, adding that a community bereft of peace would hardly attain any level of growth.

He urged Nigerians to desist from taking up arms against each other for whatever reasons but learn to live in unity and peace irrespective of their social and religious differences. Represented by the Minister of Interior, Comrade Abba, the Senate President said: "It is heart-rending to see the ordeal our people go through as a result of these skirmishes.

"The Federal Government is actually bothered by the unnecessary blood shed in some parts of the country, and concrete steps are being taken to contain such ugly incidents in the country.

"I urge everyone of us present here to do our level best to complement the efforts of the Federal Government in its sustained efforts to ensure the safety of property in the country.

"As my constituents, I feel your pains, I understand your burden but I can assure you that we will not abandon you in your time of pains, we will do everything to ensure that you all return to your respective communities and villages to enable you eke out a living for yourselves. My plea is that we must all desist from actions that could instigate crisis in our villages and communities but be vigilant and security conscious.

### Relief materials

"These relief materials will certainly not meet all your needs but I can assure you that the Federal Government has put measures in place to check and contain the crisis in the country."

Addressing the victims, the Peoples Democratic Party, PDP, deputy governorship candidate, who is an indigene of the area, Mr. John Ngbede, lamented the devastation in the affected communities. Ngbede disclosed that the marauders had over a long period sustained their attacks on the people and further occupying and annexing some Agatu communities.

He said: "Fulani herdsmen initially invaded Agatu in early 2013 and till date we have not known peace in our various villages and communities and our farmlands without resistance. They have taken over and occupied some of our villages and our people are now living as refugees in their own state; that is as bad as that."

The former Commissioner for Works and Transport, who stated that the invaders intrude into the communities from Loko Local Government Area of Nasarawa State, urged the Federal Government to establish a military base or Police barracks in Agatu to check the unending crisis. "All we are asking for at this time is for the Federal Government to establish a military base or police barracks in Agatu so that we can have enough security presence in this area.

Ngbede who assured that his people would continue to be law-abiding, urged the Federal Government to avail the helpless people more assistance to help them overcome the trauma of the devastation.

While appreciating the Senate President for extending the gesture to the displaced persons, he assured that the relief materials would be equitably distributed to the victims.

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