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FULANI HERDSMEN: Attacks threaten Nigeria's existence — NASS

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*6 more bodies recovered in Enugu; death toll now 46

*Ugwuanyi weeps, declares two-day fasting, prayers

*Refugees narrate ordeal; Ekweremadu, Bishop Chukwuma react

By Henry Umoru, Emman Ovuakporie, Johnbosco Agbakwuru, Joseph Erunke, Dapo Akinrefon, Ugochukwu Alaribe & Chimaobi Nwaiwu

ABUJA—Six more bodies were yesterday recovered from bushes in the attack spear-headed by over 500 Fulani herdsmen in Nimbo, Enugu State.

This came as the leadership of the National Assembly, NASS, expressed concern over the frequent herdsmen/farmers' clashes across the country, saying the development was capable of threatening the corporate existence of the country.

The lawmakers' position came against the backdrop of Monday's invasion of Uzo Uwani community in Enugu State by herdsmen who slaughtered over 40 persons and destroyed properties.

Many communities, particularly in the North Central and Southern states, have recently faced severe attacks allegedly perpetrated by Fulani herdsmen.



ENUGU ATTACK—Governor Ifeanyi Ugwuanyi of Enugu State(3rd left); General Officer Commanding, 82 Division of Nigeria Army, Enugu, Major General Ibrahim Attahiru (2nd left); senator representing Enugu North Senatorial District, Senator Chuka Utazi(behind); State Commissioner of Police, Nwodibo Ekechukwu (3rd right); and state Commandant of Nigeria Civil Defence Corps, Mr. Steve Lar(2nd right) at the scene of the

herdsmen's Monday attack at Nimbo, Enugu State, yesterday.

While Senate President, Bukola Saraki, sought an end to the spate of killings by the herdsmen to safeguard the country's unity and security, Speaker of the House of Representatives, Yakubu Dogara, said there was need for deliberate and proactive actions to end the incessant farmers and herdsmen clashes spreading across the country, noting that it could divide Nigeria, if not properly checked.

Speaking at yesterday's Senate plenary, Saraki urged the Senate Committee on Agriculture, chaired by Adamu Abdullahi, to fast-track the execution of the report of the Senate public hearing aimed at addressing the herdsmen crisis.

After plenary, Saraki took to his official social media pages on Twitter and Facebook, to emphasise the imperative of curbing growing herdsmen violence to safeguard Nigeria's unity.

"It is important that the violence attributed to herdsmen is addressed and curbed to ensure the safety, well-being and unity of the people and the country," Saraki wrote.

On his part, Dogara spoke at the opening of the public hearing on the motion on the 'urgent need to address the incessant clashes among herdsmen, farmers and their host communities in Nigeria' and introduction of micro irrigation (drip irrigation) for farmers in Gombi/Hong Federal Constituency in Adamawa State and other parts of Nigeria, held by House Committee on Agricultural Production and Services.

Dogara, represented by Onyema Chukwuka, urged the committee and stakeholders to make appropriate recommendations that will “go a long way in guiding the House in the enactment of appropriate legislation to guarantee peaceful co-existence among the rural communities.”

In his contribution, Audu Ogbe, Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, who expressed concern over criticism trailing proposed importation of grasses for cattle, especially on social media, warned that the challenge might boomerang if no concrete action was taken in checkmating the menace.

He said: “I hear there is a bill in the Senate seeking to create grazing routes, where are they grazing to, to another man’s farm? Creating grazing routes is not the solution as it is known worldwide that cows kept in ranches produce better than grazing cows.”

According to him, 12 states of the federation, out of the 36 states, contacted by Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development have already confirmed readiness to partner on the grazing and irrigation initiatives. Consequently, the House of Representatives has summoned the Director-General of Department of State Services, DSS, Lawal Daura. The House also mandated the Inspector-General of Police, IGP, Solomon Arase, to swing into action and conduct a thorough investigation, with a view to bringing justice to the perpetrators and providing succour to the victims and their families.



Gov Ugwuanyi of Enugu State during his visit to survivors of herdsmen attack in his state.

A member of the House of Representatives, Nkeiruka Onyejeocha, also stated that all the factors that led to the civil war in the country had resurfaced and were capable of causing havoc in the polity, if not arrested immediately.

The invitation of the DSS Director-General was sequel to the motion on matter of urgent importance, titled, “the invasion and senseless slaughter of persons in Ukpabi, Nimbo community of Uzo-Uwani Local Government Area of Enugu State by unknown herdsmen”, sponsored by Chukwuemeka Ujam, representing Nkanu Federal Constituency of the state.

The motion, however, highlighted opposition to a proposed executive grazing Bill meant to provide hectares of land as grazing reserves for nomads.

Ujam had, while presenting the motion, lamented that invasion by herdsmen was becoming a recurring issue across the country, and was becoming a threat to the security of the nation.

The House in the resolution summoned the Director General of DSS to come and explain the rising cases of unidentified herdsmen causing mayhem in the country and why they were always described as unidentified herdsmen.

Deputy Senate President, Ike Ekweremadu, also yesterday, called for an immediate resolution of the unending conflict between farmers and herdsmen, threatening to throw the entire nation into another round of crisis.

He condemned in strong terms, the killing of unarmed Nigerians in Uzo-Uwani Council of Enugu State, by persons suspected to be armed herdsmen.

Senator Ekweremadu said this during plenary when he relied on Order 43 of the Senate Standing Orders to make a personal explanation over the mayhem in Uzo- Uwani community, where he said over 50 lives were reportedly lost, while over 2000 persons were displaced and property worth millions of Naira destroyed.

He insisted that the Senate must immediately conduct a public hearing to enable all stakeholders to state their feelings and experiences with a view to finding a lasting solution to the issue.

It's time to act — Ekweremadu

He said: “Mr. President, remember I called your attention to a resolution of this Senate on Thursday, March 3, 2016. Recall that on that day, one of the issues we discussed was a motion titled ‘tackling the perennial conflicts between farmers and cattle herdsmen’.

“At the end of that debate, we took a number of resolutions. I recall that in my contribution I suggested that the Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development as well as the Committee on National Security and Intelligence do conduct a public hearing on this matter with a view to articulating a lasting solution to the problem. Up till now, that public hearing has not started.

“It is important for Nigerians to know that we are doing something about this perennial problem. It is not enough for us to be doing something; we must be seen to be doing something. I believe that it is time for the committees to come together and commence action on these resolutions namely, to start a public hearing on this problem between the farmers and the cattle herdsman.

“I say this because it is getting too late. Just yesterday, we heard that over 50 persons were killed in Uzo-Uwani Local Government in Enugu State. We heard about 2000 people were displaced and over a hundred people were injured. Houses were burnt, including churches. As I speak, some people who live in Enugu, especially the Hausa and Fulani are taking refuge in the Army barracks and it is not good for our country. These are people who didn't know about those who attacked the ordinary people of Uzo-Uwani and today they are now refugees. It also implies that if any person dies in the process, there could also be reprisals in other parts of Nigeria and this can engulf the whole country.”

Ugwuanyi weeps, calls for fasting

Meantime, Governor Ifeanyi Ugwuanyi of Enugu State, who visited the affected villages of Nimbo Ngwoko, Ugwuijoro, Ekwuru, Ebor, Enugu Nimbo, Umuome and Ugwuachara, doled out N5 million to the community to serve as immediate relief and declared two days of fasting and prayers

for God's intervention on the impasse.

The governor, who wept profusely on arriving at the scene, was greeted by decomposing bodies found in the bush even as he appealed to the Federal Government to quickly intervene and called on the community to embrace peace in the midst of the prevailing challenges.

The traditional ruler, Ukpabi, Nimbo, Igwe John Akor regretted that his subjects had in the past two years, been under constant siege unleashed by the herdsmen who raped, maimed, killed inhabitants and destroy farmland and livestock.

The monarch further regretted that the Nsukka-Adani-Umulokpa express road had been, "hell" following the activities of herdsmen who kidnap victims at will.

Vanguard's visit to Ukpabi, Nimbo, yesterday, showed that economic activities in the area have been shut down even as officials of the West African Examination Council, WAEC, involved in the conduct of exams in Ukpabi Secondary School have abandoned their duty post.

A visit to Royal Hospital Nsukka, Nsukka District Hospital and Bishop Shanahan Hospital Nsukka, showed that the 14 victims, who were hospitalized in the hospitals, are in critical conditions.

MASSOB warns herdsmen to leave

Following attacks by Fulani herdsmen in Enugu and other parts of the federation, Movement for the Actualization of Sovereign States of Biafra, MASSOB, has given a 30-day ultimatum to President Muhammadu Buhari

to end the attack on innocent Nigerians or face its wrath. MASSOB, which said it was worried by the inability of the federal government to stop the increasing destruction of farmlands, raping of women, robbery, kidnapping as well as killing of innocent Nigerians by Fulani herdsmen, accused President Buhari of protecting the attackers.

A statement made available to Vanguard by MASSOB, read in part: “We condemn attack on Biafrans by Fulani herdsmen at Uzo-Uwani council area of Enugu State. We wish to remind Ndigbo and Biafrans that this killing and destruction of property of our people by Fulani herdsmen is getting out of hands.

“The fact that MASSOB believes in non-violence does not mean that we cannot defend ourselves. It is a pity that Amnesty International has never for one day written a report against Nigerian Military and Fulani herdsmen over the killing of our people. The massacre of MASSOB, IPOB members in Aba, the Ezu-River killing of six Igbo traders in Abuja (the Apo six), the invasion of Igbo land by Fulani herdsmen, with all these things, Amnesty International has not and will never see reasons to indict the Nigerian Government because they are being controlled by the North.

“It is on record that the Nigerian Police received security report, last Friday, that over 500 Fulani herdsmen gathered in that community to attack them. This ethnic cleansing was planned against Ndigbo in 2003. Now that the power has gone to the Fulani man, they have begun to execute this evil agenda. MASSOB is calling on all the pro-Biafra groups, Igbo youths to wake up and let us unite and face our enemies. We are warning the Fulani herdsmen to leave Biafra land or they will face our wrath.”

How the attack happened—Refugees

Over 15 victims of the Fulani herdsmen attack in Enugu, taking refuge in Onitsha, Anambra State, yesterday, said that the attack would have been averted if the security agencies did not take the threat to attack them which came four days earlier with levity.

Addressing newsmen, yesterday, in Onitsha, spokesman for the Nimbo villagers who ran to Onitsha, Elder Okeja Paul said their attackers had written them through the traditional ruler of the community, Igwe John Akor, who quickly summoned a meeting of the town and mobilized security agents to ward off the attack.

He regretted that the Police, National Security and Civil Defence Corps, NSCDC and other security agents were guarding the community until Monday morning when they left, thinking that the threat was an empty one, only for their attackers to strike immediately they left, wondering why all of them had to leave at the same time, thereby creating opportunity for their attackers to strike.

Elder Okeja said that as early as 7am when their people went to their farms, over 11 people were already beheaded on their way to farm and then they entered the villages after they have killed those they met in their farms.

“The security agents were nowhere to be found when they started killing people in the town, and it was later when about 30 to 40 dead bodies littered the town that the police and other security agents arrived and they took off, without any of them being arrested.

“A youth who just concluded his National Youth Service Corps, NYSC, who just returned to the town weekend was cut down in the attack. As I am peaking with you now, nobody is in the town. The herdsmen escaped

through our boundary with Kogi State.

“There is a river called Eshi River where we have boundary with Kogi State, that is where we suspect our attackers came in from and it was from there that they escaped when the security agents arrived. Our worry is that the people were armed to the teeth with AK 47 assault rifles and we keep wondering what Fulani herdsmen will be doing with such sophisticated guns if they are not being sponsored by some well-placed people in the country,” he said.

Security threats will be smashed —Presidency

Reacting to the development last night, the Presidency said President Muhammadu Buhari, had given specific directives to the Defence Minister to smash security threats in the country.

Senior Special Assistant to the President on Media and Publicity, Mallam Garba Shehu, told Vanguard on phone, last night: “The Defence Minister has spoken this morning (yesterday) and he has said that the President has given specific directives on the issue.

“The President has given specific directives that the Defence Minister should go and smash those causing problem in the country. I think that is sufficient.”

Bishop Chukwuma blasts FG

Similarly, Archbishop of Anglican Communion, Enugu Archdiocese, Dr. Emmanuel Chukwuma has warned that if nothing was done to checkmate the Fulani herdsmen, he would personally ask the pro-Biafra groups to declare war on them.

The fiery clergy, who was visibly angry over the Monday attack by Fulani herdsmen on Enugu communities, said it was now clear that the federal government-controlled security agencies deliberately engage in select negligence.

Besides, the cleric called on the Federal Government to declare state of emergency in Igboland. The Archbishop expressed surprise that many hours after the attack, no arrest has been made.

He warned that if relevant authorities fail to curb the activities of Fulani herdsmen, they would ban the Fulani herdsmen from rearing their cattle in the zone, adding that apart from stopping them from rearing their cattle, they would mobilize Biafra agitators against the Fulani herdsmen in the zone.

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