

CRIMINAL HERDSMEN IN S/EAST: Fish out Ebonyi killers within 72 hrs, Council Chairmen give police deadline

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Armed herdsman

77-yr-old survivor relive killings

By Peter Okutu

THE killings carried out by suspected herdsman last Monday night in four communities of Egedege, Umuhuali, Obegu and Amaezu, in Ishielu Local Government Area of Ebonyi State, has attracted condemnations across the country.

There had been issues between herdsman and host communities in Ebonyi before now, but the incident that occurred in Ishielu LGA has been rated on a different scale since the creation of the state on October 1, 1996.

On Friday, the 13 Council Chairmen in the state gave security agencies 72 hours ultimatum to fish out the perpetrators of the killings.

Recall that over 15 residents were hacked to death by rampaging herdsmen who were allegedly seen carrying cutlasses and AK-47 rifles in last week's incident

While some fortunate members of the affected communities ran for their lives into Enugu State, others fell miserably to the cold hands of death in their own land.

A 77-year-old survivor, who spoke to Sunday Vanguard, explained that they (communities) began to have issues with the herdsmen when their cows started eating up their farm produce.

She said: "I am a 77-year-old farmer and my name is Mrs Rosemary Ozara. I am from Obeagu-Egedegede community, Ishielu Local Government Area of Ebonyi State.

"Currently, almost all the natives have run away for the sake of their dear lives, because nobody considers this community to be safe again.

"For like six years now, we would plant but can't harvest our farm produce. Each planting season, they (herdsmen) would uproot everything we planted and give it to their cows for feeding.

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"This had continued for a while and we approached them and said 'since you people cannot leave our crops to grow, leave our community for us'.

“After a while they left, but threatened that nobody would be in this community. They said they would deal with us and pursue us out of the community.”

Skirmishes

Sunday Vanguard reliably gathered that herdsmen attacked the four communities in Ebonyi because of the skirmishes that had occurred in time past between them and the natives.

Reacting to the development, the Commissioner of Police, Ebonyi State Police Command, CP Garba Aliyu, vowed to do everything within the ambit of the law to ensure that the suspects were arrested.

“In fact, the Command is collaborating with other security agencies and stakeholders in various communities to avert future occurrence of that kind of incident in Ebonyi”, Aliyu said.

“You know we have not experienced such an incident before.

“Very soon, testimonies will be out on the efforts of the Police in that direction.

“Police have been deployed at strategic positions within and around the affected communities.”

Cause

The Chairman of Ishielu LGA, Hon. Sunday Eze and Commissioner for Business Development in the State, Dr. Stephen Odo, who hails from the affected Council Area, led a team of security agents to the communities and condoled with the families of those killed in the invasion.

They assured that government would investigate the immediate and remote causes of the dastardly act.

‘Count us out’

Meanwhile, a leader of herdsmen in Ebonyi, simply known as Mr. Ali, who explained that none of his people was involved in the dastardly act, stated that “Ebonyi State Government doesn’t treat us badly”.

Ali went on: “None of our people was there. That place is at the boundary with Enugu. No Fulani person in Ebonyi was there.

“We cannot take the law into our hands. We in Ebonyi, our hands are not there. We are not quarreling with Ebonyi because Ebonyi State Government doesn’t treat us badly.”

Ultimatum

In a related development, the 13 Council Chairmen in Ebonyi State, at the weekend, condemned the killings by suspected herdsmen in four communities of Ishielu LGA.

They pledged their unalloyed support for the law banning open grazing across the Local Government Areas, adding that the Council areas will not take lightly any act that would cause deaths.

“We are giving security agencies in the state 72 hours to fish out the perpetrators of the dastardly act”, they said.

“We support the law against open grazing in Ebonyi. If you want to operate open grazing in the state, you should be ready to meet with us because both the Development Centre Coordinators and Local Government Chairmen in Ebonyi are already on watch to make sure that what happened in Ishielu does not repeat itself.

“Again, we want to state categorically that security agencies have not done enough to provide security for people living in different localities to make sure that what happened in Ishielu on Monday does not repeat itself; we give them 72 hours to make sure that people who perpetrated that act are arrested and the victims get justice, while we appeal to the people living in different localities to remain calm to enable the security agencies carry out this duty that we have charged them to do today.”

Public Relations Officer of the Council Chairmen and Chairman of Izzi local government area, Hon. Paul Nwogha, told Sunday Vanguard after their meeting in Abakaliki, that any herder that misbehaves should be ready to face them.

He said, “We have met today and we are here to present to you what happened in the three communities in Ishielu local government area of the state on Monday.

“It is totally condemnable as over 15 persons were killed in Obegu and Nkalaha communities of Ishielu local government areas of Ebonyi state by suspected herdsmen.

“We condemn the unwarranted, unprovoked killings of innocent people. Nothing on earth will excuse the unwarranted attacks leveled against our people and we

want to tell the general public that it is unfortunate because in Ebonyi we have been co-existing peacefully and that is the credit we give to the governor of Ebonyi, Chief Dave Umahi.

“But, surprisingly, what we are paid back with is the killing of our people.”