

## northern Trumpet



# Deadly Palm Sunday assault in Benue church

...and attacks that killed 250

By Peter Duru, Makurdi

It has been a harvest of killings in parts of Benue State in the last three weeks.

Unlike in the past experiences when the epicentre was the Tiv speaking communities in Benue North-East and West, the attention of the marauders appears to have shifted considerably to the South of Benue which is dominated by Idoma speaking people.

Before now, most incidents of herders' incursions were recorded in the Agatu axis with isolated incidents in other LGAs that make up the senatorial district, but it is now a different scenario in the entire Benue South.

From Agatu to Apa down to Otukpo, wanton killings and plundering of communities have become the order of the day.

The marauders bared the fangs on the people and turned the communities into theaters of war as numerous communities have either been sacked by the marauders or deserted by the inhabitants who fled for fear of being killed by the advancing herdsmen militia.

In the latest onslaught, Apa LGA has been worst hit with unofficial figures indicating that over 250 persons may have been killed in that LGA since mid-February 2023 when the unrestrained attacks went into full swing in that part of the state.

The traditional ruler of the area and Chairman of Apa Traditional Council, the Edojo K' Apa, Chief John Antenyi, had raised the alarm over the activities of the murderous armed herdsmen in his domain.

The monarch, who spoke in a telephone interview, lamented that communities in his domain like Ikpobi, Odugbo, Akpanta, Ologba and Oyiji, among others, had been taken over by the invaders in ceaseless attacks on his subjects.

The traditional ruler said, "Fulani are invading our local government and some communities like Ikpobi, Odugbo, Akpanta, Ologba and Oyiji have come under severe attacks. There have been killings and destruction of farm crops in those communities."

"Following the attacks, some of our villages have been deserted and these include Imana, Ologba, Akpanta and Ikobi."

"The inhabitants have relocated to

Ugbokpo, the local government headquarters, and other communities that have not recorded attacks."

Before the Antenyi's alarm, a youth leader and four others were reportedly killed in another herders attack on two communities in Agatu and Otukpo LGAs.

Affected communities were Akappa in Agatu LGA where four persons lost their lives and Ulli in Otukpo LGA where a local farmer was also said to have been killed in his farm at about the same time in an unprovoked attack.

Oshigbodu community also in Agatu LGA also came under severe attack and several lives were reportedly lost in that incident. And shortly after, the President of the Universal Reformed Christian Church, also known as NKST Church, Rev. Dr. Dominic Anza, cried out that his hometown in Turan Kwande LGA had fallen to the marauders who killed many of his neighbours and took over the community.

On his part, a former Vice Chairman of Agatu LGA, John Ikwulono, who also raised concern over the sustained unprovoked attacks on communities in the LGA, said, "We had no problem with the Fulani, there was no provocation but they came and attacked a community called Atakpa in Agatu and they killed over six persons and wounded several others."

"They come to our communities, claiming that our grass is the best for their cattle and it is on that basis that they keep terrorising our people to force them to desert their homes so that they can take over the place."

"After invading Atakpa, they attacked Okpagabi and injured many people. Some of the victims are still in hospital."

"After that they went to other villages and extended the attack to Apa LGA. They wounded some persons and also killed so many persons there."

### Palm Sunday attack

While the anger that greeted the invasions and killings was yet to die down, the marauders again struck on Palm Sunday at the Christians Pentecostal Church, located at Akenawe, Iwarey in Ukeremagya/Iwarey Council Ward of Logo Local Government Area, LGA, where they killed a worshipper and abducted the pastor of the church and other worshippers.

The attack left several of the victims injured among them the traditional ruler

of the community, Zaki Tyokase Ingyutu.

It was gathered that the invaders stormed the church during a night vigil when a healing service was being conducted by the Resident Pastor, Rev. Gwadu Kwaghty.

A community leader and President, Gaambe-Tiev Youth Association, GYA, Dr. Hemen Terkimbi, who confirmed the attack, said, "One person was killed during the attack five others sustained injuries while four worshippers including the Resident Pastor, Rev. Gwadu Kwaghty, were captured and taken to an unknown destination."

"Among those who sustained severe injuries was the Acting Kindred Head of Akemkpa, Zaki Tyokase Ingyutu, who was wounded on the head. They are currently receiving treatment at in Ugba and Anyii."

"The attack was followed by the heinous murder of the traditional ruler of Ugbobi community and several others in a renewed attack on communities in Apa LGA by the same armed herdsmen."

That attack was carried out on Monday evening after several days of sustained attacks and sacking of several communities in the LGA.

They came in their numbers shooting sporadically in Ugbobi. They killed the Chief of the area and many people. As we speak I cannot specifically tell you the number of those killed because search is going on and bodies are still being recovered as at this morning from all corners of the community," a source who volunteered information said.

### Heinous murder

"These attacks by armed herdsmen have

been going on in Apa in the last few weeks, many villages have been sacked, people killed and farm produce in bins completely burnt."

Lamenting the development, the State Chairman of Ikobi Community Development Association and National Chairman of Apa Development Association, Mr. Aggrey Eche, said, "The attackers are suspected herdsmen or bandits whatever they are but they are killers. In fact they started this way back on January 17 this year so there have been renewed attacks because it has been a routine."

"Almost every year during the dry season they come back to attack people, maim and rape women and destroy their farm crops and houses. So it has been a routine all this while."

"But this year's case is colossal because they have wiped out almost 20 villages if not more. At the moment I cannot even remember the exact number of villages that have been sacked so far which is very devastating on people's lives and economy."

Asked if the attack was provoked, Mr. Eche said no.

He went on: "For between 20 and 30 years now herders do not reside in the area because they killed an Ikobi man in 1983 and since then they ceased to settle in the place except passing through the land to other places but once they stumbled on anyone they killed him."

After the Ugbobi attack came the invasion of Umuogidi village in Enetekpa Adoka district of Orukpo LGA where three persons were murdered by the marauders.

It was gathered that the marauders stormed the village from neighbouring Apa LGA with their cattle, armed with AK47 rifles.

"They shot anyone they met or anyone who tried to stop them from grazing on people's farmland", a resident told Sunday Vanguard.

"The victims were the young men they met while marching into the villages and destroying people's farm and barn."

Confirming the attack, the Chairman of Orukpo LGA, Mr. Bako Eje, who hailed from that part of the local government, lamented that the invaders had in the last one month ceaselessly attacked that part of the state.

The attackers came in from Apa LGA through Agatu LGA. They have been terrorizing our people. They graze their cows to our area, eat up our cassava, our grains and the ones they could not eat, they just set them on fire."

Most of our people have deserted their homes and are now camping at a primary school in Adoka, these are particularly Igili and Umuogidi people."

Meanwhile, the paramount ruler of the Idoma tribe and Chairman of Idoma Traditional Council, the Ochi Idoma, Dr. John Odogbo, has been left devastated by the spate of attacks and murder of his subjects by the marauders.

Odogbo, who decried the murder of the traditional ruler of Ugbobi community in Apa LGA and over 75 others in his domain by armed herdsmen within the last few weeks, described the development as unacceptable.

Condemning the bloody attacks, the Ochi Idoma in a statement issued by his Chief Palace Scribe and Media Aide, Onuminya Odoba, decried what he termed the lack of vigilance on the part of security personnel to stem the brutal murder of his subjects and sacking of communities in Benue South by herders.

He assured his subjects that the attention of authorities would be brought to the zone to allow innocent citizens to live and run their businesses peacefully in their ancestral homes.

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different hospitals