

Death toll in Benue gang war hits 25



•3 more killed in Ayati**•Lawmaker urges govt to step up strategy to check further escalation****By Peter Duru**

Makurdi—Three more persons have been killed in Ayati Community, Ukum Local Government Area of Benue State, in the escalating rival criminal gang war that is raging in that part of the state.

The deaths have brought the number of persons killed so far in gang fight in the area in the last three days to 25.

Recall that the crisis started weekend, when no fewer than 22 persons were killed in Chito and Tyo Akosu communities of Ukum Local Government Area of the state, following the bloody fight that broke out between the 'Chain Gang' and 'Full Fire' groups.

It was gathered from a source in the area, who spoke on condition of anonymity that the fight spilled to Ayati on Sunday evening leading to the death of three more suspected gang members.

He said: "We learned that the attack in Ayati at a gathering which claimed three lives on Sunday evening was an extension of the fight that started at the weekend in Chito and Tyo Akosu. The fact is that no one knows who is who among our youths. And we cannot tell who is sympathetic to which group and who is not.

"That is why the fight is getting messier and they are killing human beings as if they are animals."

Reacting to development, the lawmaker representing Ukum State Constituency in State House of Assembly, Mr. Ezra Nyiyongo, who lamented the worsening insecurity in his constituency said it was time the state government step up its strategy to address the situation. The lawmaker said: "The situation is not too far from what has been happening. We have had that problem well before now. Just that it has taken different turns and twists but generally, we have security challenges.

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"You are aware when the serving Commissioner for Information, Matthew Aboh was picked. One of our elder statesmen was picked and he later died in their hands. So, we have been having these reoccurrences. You will hear that today, 24 people were killed, other times 11 and it keeps on happening every other day.

"You will sympathize with my people in Ukum and by extension Benue State. We as a government need to step up our strategy. I am particularly pained and I believe the government is looking into it critically. At my end, the options I have are limited for now but I think I will meet with the Executive over the matter.

"As a legislator, I have reported to my Speaker and we will take it up with the Governor and I believe we will have a headway sooner or later. I believe the governor during our electioneering campaigns promised to do everything to bring peace, even if it means bringing the carrot approach to the so-called boys in the bush.

"And I believe that it will take time because you have to start planning on where do you take them to and if the Federal Government accepts to forgive them, all is a process which I believe is ongoing. In the interim, I feel pained and sometimes I am ashamed because if it were external aggressors that are attacking us, then you can say there is breakdown of law and order but here we have a case where same brothers from the same mother and father pointing guns at each other, who is going to report who? This is the situation I am facing. It is devastating. It is really terrible."

Effort to get the Police Public Relations Officer, Catherine Anene was unsuccessful at press time.