

Herdsmen attack: Retired army officer, 15 others killed in another Benue bloodbath



A retired army officer and 15 others have been reportedly killed by suspected armed herdsmen in a Thursday evening attack on Wandor, Mbaikyor community in the Mbalom Council Ward of Gwer East Local Government Area, LGA, of Benue State.

The invaders were also reported to have razed over 50 houses, huts, farmlands and food barns in 11 settlements in the attack.

The latest attack came about six years after a similar attack by armed herdsmen on St. Ignatius Catholic Church, Ukpokor Parish, Mbalom Gwer East LGA claimed the lives of two Catholic priests and 17 parishioners.

A survivor of the attack who spoke on condition of anonymity said the well-armed marauders numbering about 40 stormed the community at about 7pm and opened fire on the locals who were taken unawares.

He said: “They came through Mbasombo into our village. There is a Fulani settlement close to the boundary between Ihyravye and Ayar. We know the Alhaji who has caused this because we had earlier arrested three of his boys and handed them over to the Police at Aliade. It was documented. But the boys were later released.

“It is that Alhaji that is operating in this axis. In fact a retired military officer that was following up the case, MWO Mbatsavbun Gbatar (retd.), the community security adviser who reported the case was among those killed.

“They took us by surprise. They came numbering over 40 at about 7pm, some had guns and others cutlasses. And the operation lasted for over three hour. As I’m talking to you now over 50 houses have been burnt.”

Continuing, he said “Immediately they came and started shooting I put a call through to someone and asked him to tell the Divisional Police Officer, DPO, of what was happening. If we had immediate interventions, they probably wouldn’t have set the houses ablaze. One of the victims was burnt alive in a house, we had to wrap him up and took him out of his house.”

According to him, among the communities razed by the marauders were Tse-Agernor, Tse- Najime, Tse- Wandor, Wandor Market Square, Tse-Ate, Tse-Anyol, Tse- Abagi, Tse-Ifian, Tse- Ukombor, Tse- Girgi Akwaya , Tse- Tion Ukpa and Tse-Abuur. Confirming the development, the Caretaker Chairman of Gwer East LGA, Mrs. Comfort Agbo said “at the moment there is relative peace in Wandor community. 16 bodies have so far been recovered. Two were injured and are receiving treatment.

“Those who attacked and killed my people are suspected armed herdsmen. The security operatives are currently moving the bodies to the mortuary.” Contacted, the Police Public Relations Officer, Superintendent, SP, Catherine Anene who confirmed the development said the Police Commissioner was on his way to the scene of the attack for on-the-spot assessment.

The Benue State Deputy Governor, Dr. Sam Ode was said to have also led a delegation to the community.

Reacting, the sociocultural group of the people of he area, the Masev Development Association, MDA, in a statement by its President General, Prof. Vearumun Tarhule, made available to newsmen in Makurdi by the Media Adviser of the MDA, Dr. David Mtswenem, expressed shock at the brutal murder of the innocent people of the area and razing of the ancestral homes of the people.

The group “expressed bewilderment at the continuous vulnerability of innocent citizens to attacks by bandits. And fervently prayed for divine mercy and assistance in every aspect of this devastating situation.”

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Part of the statement further read, “Prof. Tarhule highlighted the repeated calls to the government authorities for the protection of people’s lives and properties, which have sadly gone unheeded.

“The recent attack at Wandor, Mbaikyor, raises the pressing question: when will this end? How can our people sleep with their eyes closed? With the farming season approaching, how will our people return to their farms when their properties are destroyed, and they are displaced? These are the urgent concerns that demand immediate attention and action.”