

APC stalwart, 4 others killed in fresh herders attack in Otukpo

By Peter Duru

BENUE—AN All Progressive Congress, APC, Councillorship aspirant in the last local government polls, Amedu Agaba and four others were Wednesday night reportedly killed in the escalating crisis between armed herdsman and the locals of Okpomaju village in Okete Ward of Otukpo Local Government Area, LGA, of Benue state.

Several persons were also reported to have sustained injuries while about 10 others have been declared missing in the community.

Recall that the crisis erupted earlier in the week when suspected armed herdsmen allegedly attacked the locals of Okpomaju who were on hunt-

ing expedition after mistaking them for enemies. Three lives were lost in that incident.

It was gathered that Och'Otukpo Odu, Chief John Eimonye had summoned a meeting of the Fulani and Okpomaju community leaders to have the crisis resolved but after agreeing to embrace peace, the crisis escalated Wednesday night when armed herdsmen allegedly stormed the community, shooting sporadically and destroying houses, food barns and farmlands.

According to a source in the area, the renewed hostility has forced the people of Okpomaju and those of neighbouring communities of Odudaje, Amla, Emichi, Otukpo-Icho and Otada, the host community of the Federal

University of Health Sciences Otukpo, among others to flee their abode.

He said: "The attack was unprovoked as the hunters were at home at Okpomaju when the armed herdsmen, numbering about 12 stormed the village with sophisticated guns, shooting indiscriminately.

"In the process, they killed one Peter, popularly known as JPG and Moses, while others ran to different directions into the nearby bushes with gun shots.

"Also killed in the attack was an APC member and Councillorship aspirant in the last October local government election, Mr. Amedu Agaba.

"So far, we have recovered some bodies of those who ran to the bush making a total of five. The fifth was recovered

near Odudaje stream. And the search for more bodies is on.

"As I speak with you, we are at the graveside, burying one of the victims and also awaiting the other bodies from the mortuary."

The Chairman of the Local Government Council, Mr Maxwell Ogiri, who confirmed the development, said the police and military had deployed personnel to the community to forestall further escalation of the crisis.

The Deputy Governor of the state, Dr. Samuel Ode who hails from Otukpo, Thursday led a delegation to the area to assess the situation and prevail on the parties to sheathe their swords and embrace peace.

Effort to reach the Police Public Relations Officer, Catherine Anene was unsuccessful.