

61 killed in fresh herdsmen attacks, communal crisis in Benue



....Over 200 houses razed
By Peter Duru

Makurdi—It was a bloody weekend in parts of Benue State, following the killing of over 46 persons by rampaging armed herdsmen in two separate attacks on communities in Apa and Gwer West Local Government areas of the state.

This came as no fewer than 15 persons also lost their lives, and closed to 200 houses completely razed in a communal clash between the people of Mbakine and Ojumole, also in Gwer East Local Government Area of the state.

It was gathered from an eyewitness that the crisis in Apa started Sunday afternoon, when armed herders invaded Ijaha Ibele Ochekwu, in Apa council, killing two persons and injuring several others.

The source said: “After that incident, people fled for their lives and, when they thought it was all over about 5p.m., the herders launched a full scale attack on Edikwu Ankpali community.

“They shot and killed the defenceless people including women and children who were running for their lives. The attack was totally unprovoked.

“As we speak, 28 bodies have been recovered from the scenes of the attacks and many persons have been moved to hospitals for medical attention.”

Similarly, the marauders also stormed Tse Antswam community in Naka, the headquarters of neighbouring Gwer West council Sunday about 7p.m., shooting at everything in sight.

It was gathered that the attack in the area which is home to thousands of Internally Displaced Persons, IDPs, in the council created pandemonium in the entire Local Government Headquarters.

According an eyewitness, that attack which lasted about two hours claimed over 18 lives and while many have been declared missing and several others battling for their lives after sustained severe injuries.

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Chairman of the Gwer West Traditional Council, Chief Daniel Abomtse, who lamented the persistent attacks on his subjects by armed herders said that the armed men came in a guerrilla style and attacked Tse Antswam.

According to him, "As I am talking to you now, 18 corpses have been recovered and many people sustained varying degree of injuries.

"In fact, the way some people were butchered, I doubt if they will survive. Search is still on because many ran into the bushes with gun wounds and some also entered the well to escape the herdsmen."

The monarch said that the community attacked was opposite a military check point on Naka-Makurdi road.

Meanwhile, 15 deaths were recorded in a bloody communal clash between the people of Mbakine and Ojumole in Gwer East LGA.

According to an eyewitness, the crisis which started as a minor quarrel between two youths at a market place on Friday, escalated, weekend, claiming 15 live and leading to the burning down of over 200 houses in the Ojumole community. It was gathered that the warring parties who were Iggede and Tiv speaking people of Gwer East had lived together in peace for over 100 years before the weekend. Confirming the development, Iggede Youth Leader, Andyson Egbodo, who expressed shock at the level of destruction and number of casualties in the crisis said: "We are shocked about what happened.

"The incident happened in Gwer East between Ojumole and Mbakine communities in the LGA. In that LGA, the Akpacha Council Ward is an Iggede speaking community and they have all been living peaceful like brothers and sisters with their Tiv neighbours for over 100 years without any crisis. That is why everyone is shock about what happened which started as a minor disagreement, it was uncalled for.

"It all started on Friday and escalated to Saturday. The entire of Ojumole was burnt down, 15 persons were killed including women and children.

“Thank God for people like the Gwer East Local Government Council Chairman who has been in touch with us, the Assembly member and the House of Representatives member, who have all moved quickly to stem the crisis.

“Already, a meeting has been called at Aliade, the council headquarters to seek peaceful resolution of the crisis.”

Confirming the attacks in Gwer West and Apa LGAs, the Police Public Relations Officer, Udeme Edet said: “Tactical teams have been deployed and already on ground and are on top of the situation. I will get back to you after getting further and accurate information please.”