

IDPs, soldiers, women, children among 200 killed in fresh herders' attacks on Benue communities



File image of Benue women mourning killings in the state.

**..we were tempted to move the corpses to the highway – Community leader
By Peter Duru, Makurdi**

About 200 persons, including five security personnel and internally displaced persons, IDPs, as well as children and women, have been reportedly killed in a bloody attack by suspected terrorist herdsmen on Yelewata and Daudu communities in Guma Local Government Area, LGAs, of Benue state.

The attack, which came days after the people of the area alleged received information of the impending coordinated attacks by marauders, left many others with varying degrees of injuries.

The invaders were said to have stormed the Yelewata in their numbers from two fronts and, after overpowering the youths and the Police personnel who stood up against them, opened fire on defenceless IDPs who were taking refuge in market stalls and the community members.

It was gathered that several families were killed and burnt in their houses and in the Yelewata market stall, with many of the victims being children and toddlers who were slaughtered like animals.

While the attack on Yelewata was ongoing, another set of marauders, also in their number, besieged Daudu, in the same Guma LGA, but they reportedly met a strong resistance by the youths and security personnel, leading to the unfortunate death of some of the security personnel.

A community leader in Yelewata and former acting Chairman of the Benue State Universal Basic Education Board, SUBEB, Mr. Matthew Mnyan, who held back emotions as he spoke, said it was another dark day for the people of Yelewata, Daudu, Guma LGA and the entire state.

He said: "It started last night at about 11 pm when Fulani terrorists came from the Western part of the Yelewata and started shooting. So the police men and young people who were there tried to engage them. Suddenly, another group came from the Eastern part of the community, and they overran those trying to resist them.

"They killed our people, poured petrol on the stalls in the market and burnt them. In those stalls, we had people who moved from places like Branch Udei and people displaced from nearby villages, who slept in them because of the proximity of the Police and soldiers there. And we learnt no soldier came out to defend the people.

“As of now, from the names they are putting together, and the number of families and people that were burnt and killed are running to over 200 now. They killed and burned people in the houses. They will pour petrol and burn the whole place where people were sleeping. We had a family of 15, some families of 12, men with their two wives, children and every one of them burnt. It is a terrible sight.

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“I have asked them to search for the families and put the names together because some have been burned to ashes. Those who were rushed to the hospital were up to 46. So far, I learnt that about 20 have died and we are still putting the reports together.”

He lamented that it was a planned, unprovoked attack, adding that “for over one week we received reports from Nasarawa state that the terrorists planned to attack Yelewata, Ukoho, Ortese, Yogbo and Daudu. So they are moving to attack these places simultaneously.

“Fortunately, that same day, the ones at Daudu were dislodged, and we learnt five soldiers and police personnel were killed sadly. From the information I received, I think one of them was of the rank of a Captain.

“We learnt more than 300 terrorists were camped close to Daudu.

“It is heartbreaking, everybody is aware that the people want to take over Benue state. There are no two ways about it. They only want to grab the land.

“If you go to the east side of Yelewata, Fulanis have taken over the land and given it to some of their people to be farming. And they do not want anybody to go there. So this is a planned issue that is being executed. It was a coordinated and well-organised attack, which is why some came from the eastern part and some from the western part to execute the attack to make sure they bring the place

down.

"I cannot understand why innocent women, children and toddlers were murdered in cold blood. Children had their necks slit and were killed like animals. I cannot understand it.

"We had wanted to move all the corpses to the road, but I recalled that there was a time we did that and three persons were killed by security personnel."

Also, the President of the Association of United Farmers Benue Valley, AUFBV, Chief Dennis Gbongbon who also lamented the carnage, blamed it on those he called "Lakurawa bandits."

Gbongbon said the association received the report of "the very disturbing security threat to Tiv farmers in Yelewata community of Guma LGA, as suspected Lakurawa bandits and herders killed over 62 Internally Displaced Persons, IDPs, and farmers and houses were burnt with families beyond imagination.

"The death toll shall rise as the search and rescue mission is on. Many were burned in stores. I am right here on the ground. 85 per cent of the victims are IDPs who ran from Antsa, Dooka, Kadarko, and Giza areas and took refuge in various stores in Yelewata market and among residents. Many have been hospitalised."

According to him "the IDPs in Yelewata are still farmers. They only ran to take refuge there. While it is important to separate them, it would help us understand the deteriorating situation farmers are confronted with. Even having run from sacked homes to IDPs camp, terror still followed them unabated."

Reacting, the Special Adviser to the Benue State Governor on Internal Security, Chief Joseph Har, who confirmed development, said, "I can not give an exact account of it because I am not there physically, but I am aware that this ugly thing happened yesterday in Yelwata and at the back of Daudu. They were two different attacks. I cannot give the exact numbers because I do not have the details."

Meanwhile, a military source who preferred anonymity confirmed that two military personnel lost their lives in the attack.