

## Expect more bloodshed in Benue, Bosso, Miyetti Allah leader warns

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By **CHIOMA IGBOKWE**

**Barely** 48 hours after the mass burial of 73 victims of the recent herdsmen attacks in Benue, the National Vice President of Miyetti Allah Cattle Herders Association, Husaini Yusuf Bosso, has warned that more blood will be shed in the state if the anti-grazing law introduced by Governor Samuel Ortom is not completely scrapped.

According to him, the herders have been sorting out their issues with farmers in the state before the Ortom government enacted the anti-grazing law without consulting stakeholders.

“We, the association wrote a letter to him, even met him. We told him that this law cannot work. We told them that there is an international cattle route from Niger to Eastern Nigeria. He said he will not allow cattle to pass through Benue state even if it is the cattle route. We told him that if he wants to implement that law, he must provide a land for us to rent. He did not provide any land for cattle herders. They have been in that state even before colonial days and co-existing peacefully. We advised him and he refused to listen to us. We are not against that law but he has to provide a land for these people before implementing such a law. If there is no land, there is a problem.”

He accused the land guards hired by the state government of terrorizing the herdsmen in the name of implementing the law. “The land guards that he introduced who we all know as the civilian Joint Task Force, they are inflicting pain on the Fulani herdsmen. They attack and seize



their animals. They drag them to the nearest police station where huge amount of money is collected before they are granted bail. This is the cause of this problem. If you attack a cattle herder and collect his cattle, he has no choice but to attack.

“The law is saying that herdsmen should not pass through the state even if it’s a route to another area. In the past , if there was damage by the cattle , we had ways to settle the matter. When you damage a farm, you have to beg the owner , if they refuse, you pay for the damages. This has worked for us for years till Benue State decided to implement the anti-grazing law. We have challenged the law in court and till court decides which way forward, Governor Ortom will be held responsible for any further bloodshed. ”

He further alleged that the group as a major stakeholder was not consulted when the law was being debated. “The Nigerian constitution says that everyone has the freedom to do business anywhere in Nigeria. Before you make a law, the state assembly is supposed to organize a public hearing. They did not invite anyone of us. The major stakeholders were not there. They just heard from one side. There should be a public hearing.

“After signing the law, he invited the Miyetti Allah group and we told him not to implement the law. We told him to provide the land for these people and he refused. They started attacking them, collecting their animals, collecting money from them and that led to the crisis.

“The Tiv people who are crying foul, has anyone checked how many Fulani they have killed? We don’t know who is responsible for the recent killing and that should be left for the security agencies to fish out the culprits. Luckily earlier in the week some civilian JTF were arrested with sophisticated guns. We are ready to tell our own side of the story so that the world will hear us.

“The Fulani, their animals are dying. Before any reprisal attack, they must have killed so many Fulani and their cows. We drew the attention of the government to those killings and no step was taken to punish those that were involved.”

On the way forward, Bosso called on the federal government to intervene. “We should ban the law. Benue state government has no land that they can give out. The Tivs are not ready to give out their lands. Most of the people now travel out of the state to farm. If they are serious to implement that law, let them provide land for these people first. If not, it will not work.”

On alleged rising number of Fulani herdsmen who are into crime, Bosso said that a committee has been set up to reach out to them to stop such act. “Some Fulani herdsmen have lost thousands of cattle to rustlers. Unfortunately, most of the Fulani are trained to do only one job which is cattle rearing. We have a committee with responsibility to reach out to them. The fact remains that most of our people have fallen victim. They will kidnap their family members and force them to pay huge ransom. Most of us do not have access to journalists to tell our story and silently they victimize them.”