

Onitsha: 27 feared killed in renewed violence

state since the crises started about a month ago, Obi played down the reported cases of abuse on the part of security agencies, adding that their investigation revealed that the claims on the excesses of the law enforcement agencies were exaggerated and unfounded.

He also, claimed that they were simply aimed at rubbishing government's concern for the security of the good people of Anambra state.

But yesterday, the deputy Director of Information of (MASSOB), in the state, Mr. Mac Davies told newsmen that 27 of their members are feared dead after being taken to an unknown destination in Awka by the police.

He also added that about 23 of their members were seriously injured by the police and Army team in the renewed hunt for their men in Onitsha, adding that they would soon carry coffin round the major towns in the state like Awka, Onitsha and

■ **Okorie Uguru & Nwanosike Onu** ■

Asaba to display their grievances to the world.

Davies, who was not happy with the situation in Onitsha and the activities of the military and police forces disclosed that the team had left what they were detailed to do in the commercial city and resorted into blackmailing and intimidating innocent people, accusing everybody in Onitsha as being members of (MASSOB), instead of facing the people responsible for the crises.

However, the Onitsha youths have threatened to make the state ungovernable for every body, if their leader and their members were not released by which ever group that abducted them, adding that their silence since two days now should not be taken as weakness.

The Governor has pleaded with the residents in the city to remain calm as the situation would be resolved by his government and the federal government adding that it was

the reason President Obasanjo directed that members of NARTO, MASSOB, the Bakassi Boys, the Anambra Vigilante Services (AVS) and all other such organisations should vacate the motor parks and markets in Anambra state.

According to Obi, "May I plead with Ndi Anambra and residents of the state who hail from else where to remain calm and patient as government sanitizes Onitsha and other towns in the state with a view to freeing them form the grip of gangsters.

Meanwhile Governor Obi, has explained the genesis of the crisis.

Addressing a cross-section of Igbo leaders under the aegis of Igbo Forum, the umbrella body of Igbos in Lagos, Obi said the problem started during the Chinwoke Mbadiju administration which conceded Onitsha park to the National Association of Road Transport Owners (NARTO) in the heat of his disagreement with a rival transport association, the Nigerian Union Of Road

Transport Workers (NURTW). He said Mbadiju also conceded the Onitsha Main Market to the Bakassi Boys. He explained that when ex-Governor Chris Ngige came in, he introduced the Anambra Vigilante Service (AVS) and the Movement for the Actualisation of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB). According to him, these groups run a parallel government where they collect revenues and lock up offenders in their cells. He said while these people feed fat, the state government groans under lack of revenue. His said despite Onitsha having the biggest market in West Africa, the government hardly generate revenue from the market.

Obi said he had on assumption of office called the leaders of both AVS and NARTO to tell them their work had been cancelled and the need for them to leave the park, but their leaders advised shunned his advice.

"After series of letters to the groups, I told them all to leave the market. NARTO took an

advert in the papers and advised every member to ignore me. AVS said they are established by law. Bakassi said they have a 10-year contract. I knew there was problem. I now issued an order that nobody should pay them."

The governor also said some of them boasted of their contact with Abuja. "After the incident, I spoke with President Obasanjo, he said I was at liberty to do whatsoever necessary. I then called on the Federal Government to take a stand because all these came as a result of politics."

He said currently the situation is under control, assuring that normalcy would soon return.

Meanwhile, the self-styled political godfather of Anambra State, Chief Christian Uba, has denied allegations levelled against him that he was the brain behind the Onitsha crisis, saying he has no hands in both the current Onitsha crisis and the ones that happened during the administration of the ousted Governor, Dr. Chris Ngige.

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