

3 Killed as Police foil attempt to kidnap Igwe Achebe

ALPHONSUS NWEZE, Onitsha

At least three persons including a woman were killed Thursday evening during an alleged kidnap attempt on the Obi of Onitsha, Igwe Alfred Achebe at Ime-Obi palace on Awka Road.

Those killed include two of the kidnappers and a woman who was passing by during a shoot-out between the kidnappers and Mobile Police men who were on the guard at the palace.

However, the Traditional Prime Minister of Onitsha, Chief Chike Ofodile (SAN) told newsmen that there was no attempt on the Obi of Onitsha who is now in seclusion in preparation for the 8th *Ofala* Festival billed to hold between October 5 and 6, 2009.

He said the hoodlums were in their normal rampage in Onitsha but people mistook it as if they had come to kidnap the monarch, stressing however that the police was quick to respond and are in better position to confirm the incident.

Saturday Champion gathered that the gunmen numbering about 10 who operated with a Sports Utility Vehicle (SUV) and a Mercedes salon car were eventually dislodged by the men

of Special Anti-Robbery Squad, (SARS) attached to the Onitsha Area Command.

According to an eye witness, the gunmen engaged the police in a gun duel but the Police overpowered them, killing two of them in the process, while a stray bullet killed a woman said to be a beans cake (*akara*) baker.

Contacted, the Onitsha Police Area Commander, Mr. John Nwele, who confirmed the incident, said the police recovered the vehicles used by the kidnappers, some arms and ammunition including a rocket launcher with war-head, five AK 49 rifles, 53 loaded live magazines, 14 expended magazines, one giraffe grenade and one bag containing clothes.

Also the Anambra State Police Command Public Relations Officer (PPRO), Mr. Emeke Chukwuemeka commented on the incident, saying that the kidnappers started their operation at Neni, in Aniocha local government area down to Onitsha between 7.00 p.m. till 10.00 p.m.

"Actually, there was an attempt by some hoodlums

to abduct the monarch on Thursday evening but was foiled by policemen within Onitsha who gave a hot chase and gunned down two of them," said Chukwuemeka.

But Chief Ofodile said "it was the usual rampaging of hoodlums in the city but this time were captured by the Police, they did not come for the monarch, the Igwe is safe preparing for his *Ofala*".

Ofodile assured all the participants and guests at the *Ofala* festival that there will be adequate security at the annual festival, saying that the organizing committee are working in collaboration with all the security outfits in the state to ensure maximum security.

He said the high point of this year's *Ofala* Festival will be the formal presentation of Onitsha constitution in written form which embodies the town's marriage ceremony, funeral rites, dispute resolutions, among others.

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STEVE OKO, Umuahia

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