

Ebonyi: Communal clash claims 5

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NO fewer than five persons have been killed while several others sustained bullet wounds last weekend in a renewed communal war involving the people of Ezillo and Ezza in Ishielu Local Government Area of Ebonyi State.

Most of the victims are believed to be travellers plying the Enugu-Abakaliki road, a trans-African highway that stretches from Benin Republic through Lagos Enugu, Ebonyi to Cross River and Cameroon.

Investigation by *Daily Champion* revealed that the communal crisis which erupted since May 10, 2008 over erection of GSM phone booth in a local market have pitched the two communities against the other since then.

However the shooting intensified in the last one week with innocent travellers along the route being the worst hit as soldiers deployed to the flash points are no longer seen at any of the road blocks on the highway.

One of the buses attacked last weekend, according to eyewitness account said the 608 mini commuter bus was heading to Ogoja from Lagos before it was attacked by the hoodlums.

Two survivors of the attack are currently receiving treatment at the Federal Medical Centre Abakaliki, where one of them, Richard Ogar from Ukele in Yala Local Government Area of Cross River State told our reporter that they were coming from Lagos in a 608 bus bringing home a corpse of one their relations when they ran into the gun men.

"As we were driving some of them came out of the bush and we started hearing kpoai! Kpoai! And they started pursuing us with Okada and as were trying to escape to enter the police station our vehicle fell inside

a ditch. I came out and entered inside a culvert there, they killed my driver and the man who owned that corpse," he narrated in tears.

When our reporter visited the area three of the corpses were seen opposite the Ishielu police headquarters while the other two were placed opposite the Ishielu Council Headquarters.

Meanwhile, five armored personnel carriers (APC), soldiers and mobile policemen numbering over 200 were last weekend deployed to the area by state government to help ensure the safety of travellers and motorist plying the express road.

The Police Public Relations Officer (PPRO) Mr. Chris Anyanwu, an Assistant Superintendent of Police (ASP) who confirmed the deployment of the armored personnel carriers to the area also confirmed the death of two persons, the presence of a coffin in the commuter bus and attack on Ishielu police post regretting that each time there was a renewed hostility in the area, the Divisional Police station at Ishielu had been the target.

The situation has seriously affected traffic on the Abakaliki-Enugu express road and instilled fear on travellers, commercial and private drivers as well as the villagers. Most travellers now prefer plying Afikpo, Okigwe to Enugu road a distance of about three hours or more rather than risk their lives along Abakaliki-Enugu express road.

Last week Ebonyi State government had through the Commissioner for Information and Orientation, Comrade Egwu, Chima alleged high importation of arms and ammunition by politicians from the state resident in Abuja to be used to unleash mayhem in Ezillo.

It is estimated that more than 100 lives may have been lost and property worth millions of naira destroyed while thousands of people have been displaced since Ezillo/ Ezza war started.