

# 1 feared dead as shooting continues in Ezillo

KENNETH OFOMA, Abakaliki

DESPITE the arrest and detention of prominent persons from the two warring communities of Ezillo and Ezza in Ebonyi State by the police headquarters, Abuja, and the arrest of six mercenaries at the fighting zone by Ebonyi State Police Command last weekend, shooting and killing of innocent road users along the Ezillo-Ezza axis of the Enugu-Abakaliki federal highway continued yesterday.

Gunmen suspected to be hired militants yesterday attacked travellers, killing one and critically wounding 15.

It is reported that the attack was targeted at three commercial buses being escorted by two police armoured personnel carriers (APCs) along the road.

When our reporter visited Federal Medical Centre (FMC), Abakaliki, where most of the victims were being treated, 13

of them were seen writhing in pains and screaming for help on the floor of the Accident/Emergency Unit of the hospital.

Mr. Chinedu Onwe, a native of Ezzangbo, near Abakaliki, and one of the commercial bus drivers involved in the attack, told our reporter that they got to the Ezillo axis of the road and ran into a hail of bullets from both sides of the bush, despite the presence of the APCs.

"As the bullets rained, I lost consciousness and only got revived in this hospital where I was informed that my wife who was also with me inside the bus had been taken to another unit of the hospital," he said.

Mr. Okezie Chagwu from Enugu and another driver told this reporter that they were shot by the hoodlums from trees at both sides of the road; one of his passengers, a relative of his was shot dead. The Chairman of the

Medical Advisory Council (MAC) and Head of Clinical Services of the hospital, Dr. Azubike Onyebuchi, who took some newsmen round the wards, said that the situation had become recurrent and was taking a huge toll on the operations of the hospital.

"Virtually every morning we get cases from the troubled area and we give them free treatment despite the fact they are brought in critical conditions."

"Despite the ugly development, we have briefed our staff on the challenges ahead while also beefing up facilities in readiness to offer the best services to victims," he said.

When contacted, the Police Public Relations Officer (PPRO) of the State Police Command, Mr. Chris Anyanwu, an Assistant Superintendent of Police, said although the command was yet to receive official report

but they got information about the reported attack.

He stated that the killing along the road will soon be over following counter-measures being put in place by the police, which he said was already yielding results.

It will be recalled that prominent politicians and public office holders including local government chairmen and National Assembly members from the affected communities were invited to Abuja last week where most of them are still being detained for allegedly sponsoring the militants.

Similarly, Ebonyi State Police Command last Saturday arrested six mercenaries said to be responsible for the recent killings of innocent people including soldiers and police men along the Enugu-Abakaliki federal highway.

The police command declined to parade the hoodlums before newsmen in Abakaliki, saying they would be transported to Abuja where they would be paraded by the Inspector-General of Police himself.

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