



■ Vandalised vehicle, electronics and houses during the clash at Enwang

How 104-year-old family feud resurfaced, claimed 10 in A/Ibom

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It was an ominous new year beginning for the families of Uko Akai Ukonteghe and Uko Akai Uko Akpan Ewang in Mbo Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State, as the two brothers took up arms against one another penultimate Friday. The two families killed, maimed and destroyed each other's property.

People of the area are yet to come to terms with the ugly reality of how the families with common origin and history got entangled in dispute over a piece of land that had defied solution over the years.

Weekly Trust learnt that no fewer than 10 people had lost their lives. One of the victims was beheaded and 25 others seriously wounded, while property estimated at several millions were destroyed in the renewed violence between members of the families.

Although the guns have gone silent, normalcy is yet to return to the two feuding families. Fear and anxiety pervaded the entire

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environment. There was ominous silence in both camps and every moment seemed pregnant with fear of possible reprisal attacks. What was discernible was fear of the unknown.

The two sides suffered both human and material losses. Many houses were either destroyed or burnt down, and cars seized and their windscreen smashed. Motorcycles and electronics were not left out in the violence as the arsonists invaded their victims' homes, brought them out and burnt them to ashes.

The crisis which started since 1909 has been in court. *Weekly Trust* investigation revealed that several attempts to settle the case in court since 1909 and 1927 have failed.

The bone of contention centered around

a piece of land belonging to members of the same family at Ukonteghe. It was gathered that some members of the family migrated to Ewang, and lived there and over the years refused to go home to their brothers they left behind. Sources said the family at Ukonteghe were not happy with the development and therefore denied them access to land jointly owned by their forefathers.

"Since you now claimed that you are not from Ukonteghe, never you farm on the piece of the land again," the source said

The latest crisis was allegedly ignited by a group of gangsters from Uko Akai Uko Akpan Ewang, who went to the disputed land and started harassing, molesting, beating and maiming anybody they see on their way.

A teacher from Ukonteghe village, Mr. Etim Asuquo Effiong, told *Weekly Trust* that the disputed land has been a source of a recurring clashes between the two families for a long time now, and government has continued to pay little attention to the crisis.

He said: "It's a long standing problem, and this case is not between the entire Ukonteghe and Ewang community as it is being said. There is a particular family called Uko Akai that exists in Ukonteghe, and there is another Uko Akai at Uko Akpan Ewang. These two families are of the same parents.

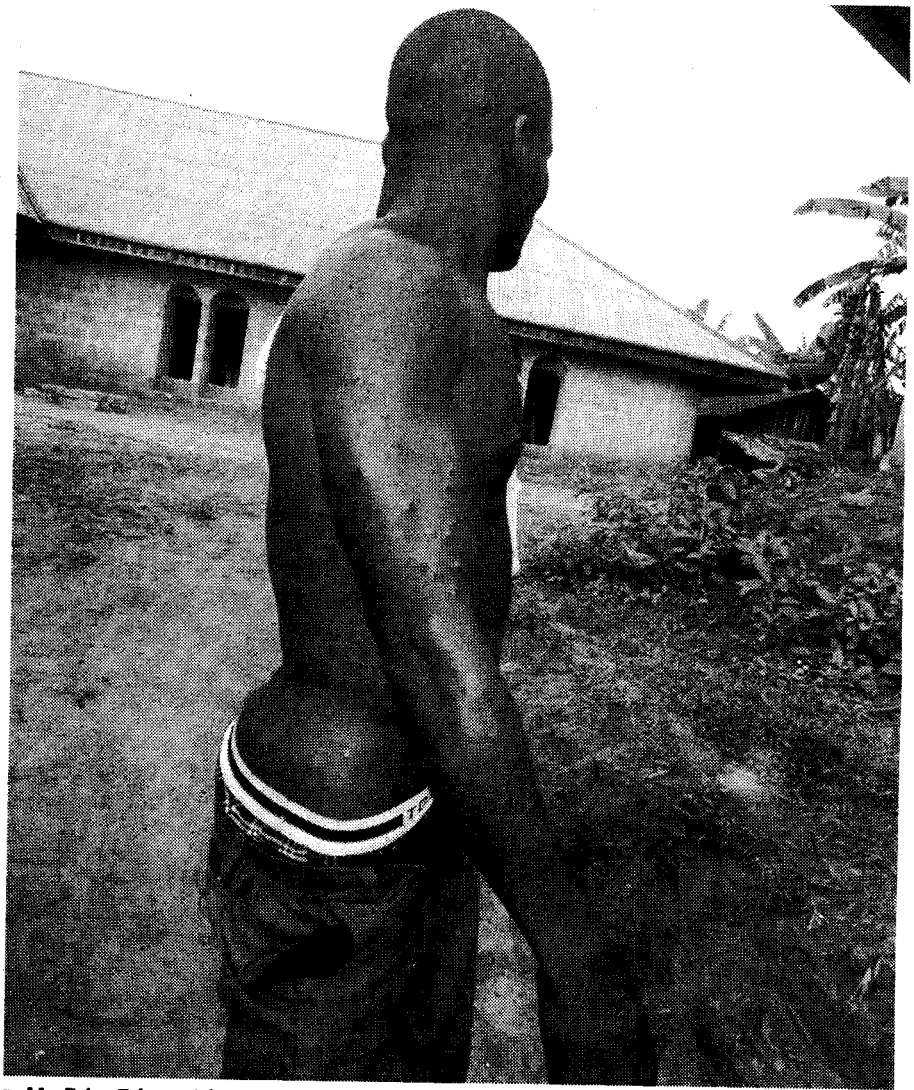
"The other factions of Uko Akai migrated to Ewang, and live there now. Those at Ewang now rejected that they are not from Ukonteghe, yet within them they are bearing the same family name.

"Now the actual people who are living at Ukonteghe told them severally that if they know that they are no longer from Ukonteghe, never they come and farm in our land since they claimed they are from Ewang.

"In the whole of Uko Okpan village, there are five big families, it's only that family that farm in that piece of land, so every year there must have problem."

On the court case, which seemed beyond solution, he confirmed that "This case has been settled severally in court since in 1909 and 1927, and even before former Inspector General of Police Sir Etim Inyang. And in each of the cases, they had been told to go and make peace pay, levies to the two sides since they are brothers.

"They sacrificed goat and accepted that they are from Ukonteghe. Now the ring leader in Uko Okpan refused to comply with those verdicts. In 2009, one of them, Okon Robert, crossed the boundary and built his house. I don't know what happened, the man complained that the mud house he built was



■ Mr. Etim Edet with injuries from locally-made guns

destroyed by Ukonteghe people.

"Without the knowledge of Ukonteghe people, the other people blocked the access road and killed two people, injured many, burnt houses and cars and other property. This case was reported at the state police command Ikot Akpan Abia, where all these exhibits were tendered, but nothing was done.

"The police could not make any arrest, and the paramount ruler could not bring the two parties together to settle the case. The case still remains unresolved until today.

"No body in Ukonteghe envisaged the last crisis which happened on Friday 4th, 2013. We were all going about our normal business when people from Uko Akpan Ewang with machetes, guns and sticks came over to the land where some Ukonteghe family members were farming. They attacked us; abducted some and out rightly murdered others. Up till now the where about of those abducted are unknown.

"Some security men whom we thought came to enforce peace led, latter invaded our community, destroyed our property, and burnt our houses.

"Though there are security teams patrolling the area, we still live in fear. We need government to come in, we need intervention from relevant authorities," he cried out.

A victim from Enwang, Mr. Etim Edet, who sustained bullet wound from an earlier attack, told *Weekly Trust* that he returned from his hideout to find his home vandalised. "I was not around when youths from Ukonteghe entered Enwang and started killing people, destroying houses. I only came back to see my house vandalised.

"Some of us from this area had fled this part of the community for fear of attack from Ukonteghe people. I sustained bullet injuries from an earlier attack and the experience is not palatable," he said.

The Divisional Police Officer (DPO) in charge of the area could not be reached for comment, but a police source who spoke on condition of anonymity dispelled the fear that there could be reprisal attacks from either of the two sides.

"You can see that the patrol team is all over the place making sure that there is no problem again from the two sides," the source said.

Though the source could give the number of those arrested, he said investigation is on to determine the level of involvement of those in their custody.

With the latest crisis taking a heavy toll on members of the community, it remains to be seen what the government will do to bring members of the feuding families to amicable settlement.