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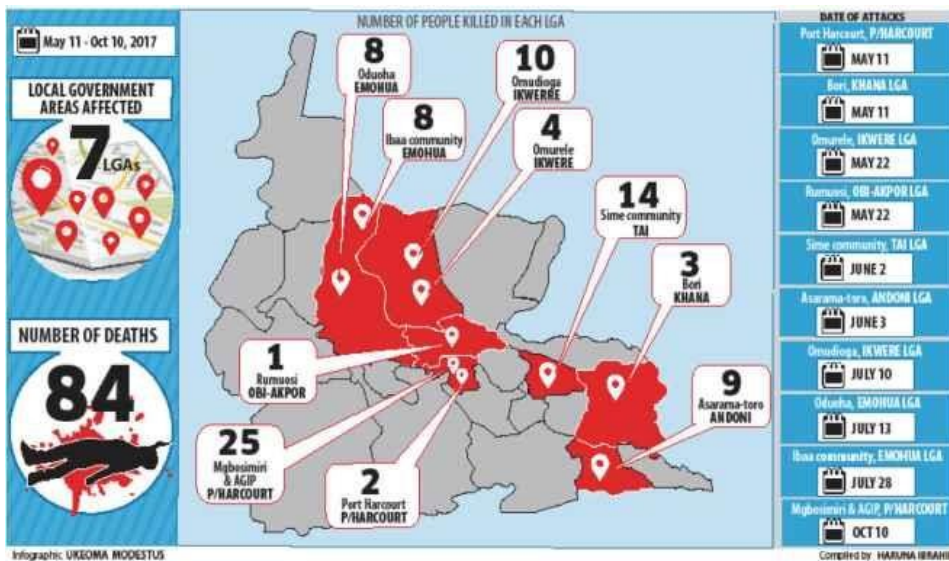
General

When gunmen killed 13 persons in Rivers

By Victor Edozie, Port Harcourt | Publish Date: Oct 15 2017 2:00AM

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When gunmen killed 13 persons in Rivers

Ngbuoshimini, a slum settlement mainly dominated by low income earners in the Rumeme axis of Obio Akpor Local Government Area of Rivers State, lost its peace on Monday last week when unknown gunmen suspected to be cultists invaded the community and killed 13 persons.

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Ngbuoshimini is sandwiched by a canal that emptied at the popular Eagle Island and play host to the Nigerian Agip Oil Company. The community also has a market and a popular abattoir which serves as a meeting point for people from different tribes who visit the market to make bulk purchases of meat and other food items.

The community has been embroiled in leadership crisis over who controls the royalty accruing from the Nigerian Agip Oil Company. Our correspondent also gathered that a deadly cult group, known as Ice Landers, has been a willing tool in the hands of factions in the community's leadership dispute, to kill and intimidate those that are opposed to them.

The Monday killing was not the first time cult groups would unleash terror on the residents.

A prominent youth leader, Minikwu Chukwu and another resident, Cletus Barigbinee, were reportedly killed by the same group in July this year. Chukwu's offence was that he was in support of a prominent leader of the community, who some factions were opposed to. He was shot dead by the armed gangs as he was about to attend a community meeting.

If the killing of Chukwu was treated with kid gloves, the Monday killing of 13 persons is very pathetic. Residents are apprehensive and are leaving in fear. However, calm has returned to the community because of the heavy presence of anticultism police officers drafted from the Rivers State police command.

The Monday killings left in its trail, a couple that wedded six months ago. The bride was six months pregnant. Other victims were a two-month-old baby, two Hausa businessmen, Nasiru Muhammed and Mamud Ibrahim, as well as other men and women.

A resident of the area and neighbour to Muhammed and Ibrahim, Abdullahi Umar, who witnessed the incident from a hideout, said the armed gang invaded the area at around 3.30am. He said Muhammed was the first person accosted by the gunmen, who demanded money from him. He was a popular cattle seller in the market.



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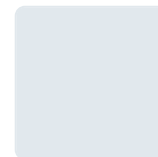


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“Nasiru was a cattle seller in the market. The one-room apartment he shared with Ibrahim and two other persons is adjacent to the abattoir. At about 3.30am, the gunmen invaded the area from a bush close to the abattoir. I was outside the house, so I took cover when I heard the bandits harassing Nasiru.

“When the gunmen accosted Nasiru, they asked him to give them money, but he told them that he had no money. One of them said, ‘You are a cattle dealer and you said you didn’t have money.’ At that juncture, I heard gunshots about three times. A close look at his corpse revealed that he was shot three times at different parts of his body. Mamud, who was with him, wanted to run, but he was hit by a stray bullet because they were firing sporadically,” Umar said.

He said that after killing Nasiru, the gunmen moved from house to house and shot occupants.

“They also shot a cow, but it was still breathing after the incident. It was in the morning that the cow was killed by abattoir attendants,” he said.

Another resident, who identified himself as Suleiman, said the gunmen invaded the community in the early hours of Monday and opened fire on some of the traders who slept in the market. He said most of the victims slept in the makeshift store built within the abattoir. He added that other victims were residents who were displaced from their homes by flood and were lying outside when the gunmen invaded the area.

“Somebody called to inform me that gunmen had killed some persons at the abattoir. We started making calls, and by 6.00am when we got there, we saw corpses lying everywhere. I counted about 10 corpses,” he said.

When the Rivers State Governor Nyesom Wike visited the scene of the incident, he vowed to fish out the killers and bring them to book. Speaking on Tuesday when he led members of the State Security Council for an on-the-spot assessment of the community, the governor said security agencies had been empowered to fish out the culprits.

He said: “This is most unfortunate. Those involved in this dastardly act will not go scot free. The security agencies have been empowered to go after them.

“Everybody should remain calm as we are taking measures to ensure that our people are protected from such ugly attacks.”

Meanwhile, the killings at Ngbuoshimini have elicited angry reactions across the state.

The senator representing Rivers East, Magnus Abe, condemned the killings and expressed worry over the rising cases of violent crimes in the state. He called on the Rivers State government to assist security agencies in the state with the needed tools to tackle security challenges.

The state chapters of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) and the All Progressives Congress (APC) are trading blames over who was responsible for the killing.

While Chris Finebone, the publicity secretary of the APC, blamed the state government for what he described as the rising cases of insecurity, his PDP counterpart, Samuel Nwanosike, said he should be arrested to explain what he knew about the killings.

While suing for peace, the South-South and South-East coordinator of the Arewa Consultative Forum (ACF), Alhaji Musa Saidu, urged the Rivers State Government to provide the needed support for security agencies to protect citizens’ lives and property in the state.

Meanwhile, the Rivers State command of the Nigeria Police Force has declared eight persons wanted over the Ngbuoshimini killings.

The public relations officer of the command, Nnamdi Omoni, said the preliminary investigation carried out by the police showed that the act was carried out by a 10-man gang.

Omoni noted that the Ice Landers cult group was responsible for the killings, adding that 10 members of the cult in the area had been fingered.

He, however, said the identity of two of the suspects had not been fully obtained. He explained that the eight persons already declared wanted by the police were the prime suspects of the dastardly act.

