

NEWS

16 die in Enugu communal clash

*From Lawrence Njoku,
Enugu*

ABOUT 16 persons were feared dead while over five houses were razed yesterday in a communal violence that has in the last three days engulfed the Mgbowo community in Agwu Local Council of Enugu State.

Also, unconfirmed reports said yesterday that 10 others were critically injured and were receiving treatment in various hospitals in the state.

The Guardian learnt that the violence, which broke out in the area on Saturday, was caused by the shooting

by a detachment of policemen of six youths who were protesting the security agents' interference in the activities marking the community's yearly 'Iri Ji' cultural festival.

But the police in Enugu, which confirmed the crisis, denied any involvement in it. The State Command's Public Relations Officer, Mr. Mike Abattam, said the youths were protesting the creation of two autonomous communities from the area by the state government, an action that could produce two additional traditional

rulers in the area. One of the leaders of the two feuding groups had reportedly refused to vacate his office as traditional ruler for the other.

Some villagers who refused to mention their names, alleged that the policemen were invited by some prominent members of the community who feared that the festival might be turned into a political platform by their opponents.

The uniformed men, who reportedly arrived at the town with an "armoured vehicle", were said to have clashed with the youths when they (policemen) allegedly smashed canopies and seats arranged for the festival at the premises of the Mgbowo Boys Secondary School.

They said that following the shooting during which six of the youths died instantly and many others severely injured, their colleagues regrouped in the evening and resolved to vent their anger on the

prominent indigenes suspected to have invited the police to disrupt the ceremony. They reportedly went on a rampage burning several houses belonging to the alleged instigators of the police action.

The violence continued until Monday but later subsided following an emergency visit by the Enugu State Commissioner for Police, Mr. Charles Dawodu, who led a team of senior police officers to the area.

When *The Guardian* visited Mgbowo yesterday,

residents wore sober look and continued to reflect on the sad events of the previous days. The decomposing body of a middle-aged man who apparently was trampled to death during the rampage was seen lying along a major road in Mgbowo.

Some of the residents traced the trouble to the appointment of two unpopular indigenes to the traditional leadership of the two autonomous communities, which were recently created by the state government.