

Violence Rocks Abeokuta

• Soldiers Deployed To Keep Peace

FROM CHARLES COFFIE
GYAMFI, ABEOKUTA

ABEOKUTA, President Olusegun Obasanjo's hometown was in turmoil yesterday as supporters of the ruling Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) and those of the All Nigeria Peoples Party (ANPP) engaged one another in a bloody clash.

The fracas, which began on Friday evening, resulted in the deployment of heavily armed soldiers to Abeokuta streets at about 1pm. The battlefields were largely around Ijaye and Car wash, Adatan areas of the city.

It also led to the arrest of the Ogun State governorship candidate and serving Senator, representing Ogun Central, Senator Ibikunle Amosun.

The state Commissioner for Information and Strategy, Kayode Samuel said, at a press conference, later yesterday, that President Obasanjo had ordered the troops' deployment to complement the efforts of the Police in maintaining peace.

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Soldiers Deployed To Keep Peace In Abeokuta

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• PDP, ANPP Trade Blames • Senator Amosu Arrested

By the time the bloody clash, which sent residents of some parts of the city scurrying for safety, ended at about 2pm, about 15 persons had received serious matchet wounds on their body.

Among those who were seriously wounded were the ANPP National Vice -Chairman, Chief Derin Adebiyi and Amosu's elder brother, Alhaji Abidoye Amosu. Fifteen vehicles belonging to both the PDP and the ANPP were destroyed.

Both parties are trading blames, accusing each other of being responsible for thuggery.

Amosu had, yesterday morning at his Abeokuta residence, addressed a press conference where he alleged that his campaign team and supporters "have been subjected to series of planned, unprovoked, premeditated attacks by the PDP sponsored thugs."

He explained that yesterday's trouble started when PDP thugs attacked his supporters at Ijeun - Titun, with three of them seriously wounded and several others battered. Ten vehicles were also vandalised in the attack.

The vehicles, he said, included one of his campaign buses; two campaign buses of ANPP Senatorial Candidate, Dr. Lanre Tejuoso; a Mercedes Benz salon car, belonging to the party's Chairmanship aspirant for Abeokuta South, Alhaja Kafayat.

"These thugs also descended on innocent bystanders, destroying motor - cycles, cars and other valuable items," he added. "It took intervention of members of the public to ward off these thugs".

Amosu, who alleged that there had been series of attacks on his campaign since it was launched some months back, urged the PDP to eschew violence and instead sell their pro-

grammes to the electorate.

In his speech, titled: "Before PDP Set Ogun State on Fire," he said, "I want to use this medium to call the attention of Mr. President to these attacks and advise that the State Government be prevailed upon to call its agents of destruction to order".

Amosu showed journalists three of his supporters, who wore bandages around their heads, hands and chests as part of those allegedly, matcheted by the PDP thugs.

But the PDP debunked the allegation, insisting that the ANPP were the ones trying to cause confusion in the state.

At a press briefing, later in the day, the state party Chairman, Chief Joju Fadairo alleged that the ANPP is notorious for violence.

Said he: "In the last 24 hours, there have been cases of unprovoked attacks, especially in Ijaiye, Abeokuta South Local Government Area, where over 20 vehicles and 10 houses were vandalised by hoodlums, allegedly led by Senator Amosu.

Fadairo's speech, titled, "Enough of this violence," continued: "Only last week, the campaign tour of the ANPP gubernatorial candidate, Senator Ibikunle Amosu to some parts of the State, also turned violent as innocent residents were attacked at Ososa, Omu, Idowa, Ijebu - Ode and Imeko - Afon".

According to him, the genesis of the Abeokuta violence was that ANPP thugs invaded a PDP ward meeting at Ago - Ijesha to attack the people, after which "the hoodlums moved to the local government secretariat of the PDP in Ijaiye, where extensive damage was inflicted".

Fadairo, who addressed the press conference alongside Samuel, said the ANPP thugs attacked and brutalised anyone found with the insignia or symbol of the PDP.

He showed newsmen two PDP supporters, who were also allegedly attacked by the ANPP supporters.

As soon as Amosu finished addressing his press conference, over 50-armed policemen, led by the State Deputy Commissioner of Police, Dipo Ayeni stormed his house.

While Ayeni went inside the house, the other policemen and officers of the State Security Service waited outside the house.

After a brief meeting inside, Ayeni led Amosu outside where he (Amosu) told reporters he was being taken to the police station.

He decided to trek, instead of boarding the police vehicle, with Ayeni walking with him to the Ibara Police Station from where he was told to go to the Police Headquarters, Eleweran, about 10 kilometers. He still insisted on trekking to Eleweran, followed by his numerous supporters.

But at Car Wash, Adatan, suspected PDP hoodlums attacked the crowd and Amosu had to be whisked to a nearby house by some of his aides.

Policemen later came and drove him to Eleweran, where he was kept. One of his aides said he was still being kept at the police headquarters at press time.

A statement by the Information Commissioner of Ogun State, titled, "Federal Government Deploys Soldiers to Abeokuta," reads in part:

"In order to ensure adequate protection of lives and property in Ogun State, the Federal Government has directed the beefing up of

security in and around the state capital, with the deployment of soldiers to augment efforts of the Nigerian Police with immediate effect.

"This measure has become necessary because of the activities of some hoodlums and miscreants, operating under the aegis of a politician. On the morning of Saturday March 10, 2007, the politician and his armed followers unleashed a reign of terror on the people of Abeokuta and, in the process, destroyed property while some residents sustained various degrees of injuries. Members of the public are hereby enjoined not to panic at the sight of the soldiers, who have been fully briefed to protect lives and property.

"This is part of the confidence building initiative of the Federal Government to ensure that peace reigns before, during and after the general elections."

The State Governor, Otunba Gbenga Daniel yesterday visited Ijaiye to assess the extent of damage.

A visibly worried Daniel said, "it is sad, it is unbelievable" and expressed the hope that security agent would do their work to maintain peace.



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