

10 feared killed as rural gangs clash in Port Harcourt

NO fewer than 10 persons were feared killed and several others severely injured in Port Harcourt, the Rivers State capital, early yesterday as two rival gangs engaged each other in a gun duel.

Though the immediate cause of the gang war between members of the Deebam and Ku Klan Klux (KKK) was unknown, their resumed hostilities had heightened tension in Port Harcourt, particularly in the Diobu area of the city.

Witnesses told *The Guardian* that a group of

armed youths invaded the Diobu area of Port Harcourt at about 7.00 a.m. According to the sources, the gang, believed to be members of the KKK, parked their two cars in front of Empress Cinema on Okija Street before launching their attack.

The Guardian gathered that some of the members crossed over to Akubeta Road and killed no fewer than five persons.

While this was going on, those stationed in front of the Cinema suddenly started shooting sporadically into the air.

*From Kelvin Ebiri and
Rose Ann Chikereuba,
Port Harcourt*

In the process, a stray bullet hit a woman who was driving through Okija Street and killed her instantly. Three other young men, among them one Emeka, who resides at 45, Okija Street, were also slain by the gunmen.

A neighbour of the deceased Emeka, who pleaded anonymity, told *The Guardian*: "He went to Gambia Street to purchase some items when he ran into the gang who opened fire on him. He was killed alongside his

friend who was seeing him home."

When *The Guardian* visited Akubeta Road, scores of women and children were wailing over the death of their relations.

At least four bodies were seen being carried away to the morgue.

Another witness, Miss Rita Jombo, said some panic-stricken persons who ran into the gangs were beaten severely. Some of the victims in the process of escaping from the scene of the conflict, fell into gutters and sustained injuries. It was also gathered that

cutlasses were also used to inflict injuries on some persons.

The fierce gun-battle forced all shops on the busy Okija Street and some sections of Ikwerre Road as well as Emenike Street to close. The chaotic situation also caused the Police to barricade part of Ikwerre Road close to the Mile One Police Station.

The fighting, according to sources, spread to other parts of the city. The rival gangs also reportedly clashed along Sangana Street and Abonnema Wharf. Sporadic gunshots were also

reported in other parts of Port Harcourt.

After the attack, the KKK members who took the rival Deebam members by surprise, escaped through one of Port Harcourt's notorious slums, Elechi Beach axis.

The Rivers State Police Public Relations Officer (PPRO), Mrs. Ireju Barasua, who confirmed the incident, said two rival gangs were involved in the conflict. She said about seven persons were reportedly killed.

She explained that the state Police Command was working towards reducing the high level of violence which has continued to plague Port Harcourt recently. None of the gang members had been arrested as at press time.

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