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Mayhem in Oyo over alleged police killing

- Four feared killed
- Police station, 15 vehicles, others torched

From Iyabo Lawal, Ibadan

AN orgy of violence erupted yesterday in sleepy Omi Adio village in Ido Local Council of Oyo State when suspected members of the National Union of Road Transport Workers (NURTW) clashed with policemen in the area.

At the end of the mayhem, which broke out in the morning, four persons were feared killed, while the police station was burnt down along with 15 vehicles and four motorcycles.

Trouble started when one of the drivers said to have been arrested by a police officer for violating traffic regulation and was detained, died moments after his release from police custody. The death of the driver simply identified as Kunle, drew the ire of his colleagues who accused the police of allegedly torturing him to death.

They claimed that the deceased NURTW member was bleeding through his nostrils and ear before he died.

The irate drivers quickly mobilized and went to the station with Kunle's corpse to protest the alleged inhuman treatment meted out to him. Rather than douse the brewing tension, the action of the NURTW men infuriated the officers on duty and a brawl ensued.

While the cutlass-wielding NURTW members were said to have descended on the Officer-in-Charge (OC) of the station, Emmanuel Orunisajo and macheted him severally before setting the station ablaze, other officers retaliated and fired shots at the rampaging drivers.

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Pandemonium broke out as people including traders and commuters abandoned their wares and ran helter skelter for their dear lives.

The victims were alleged to have been killed by police bullets while

several others sustained injuries and were rushed to a nearby private hospital, which rejected them before they were taken to the University College Hospital (UCH).

The injured police officer according to an eyewitness, was taken to an undisclosed hospital by his colleagues while the whereabouts of others was not known after the irate hoodlums set their station ablaze.

When The Guardian visited the scene, the whole area was deserted as people had fled for safety. The area was still enveloped in smoke due to burnt vehicles and motorcycles.

Besides, blood stains were seen on different spots in the area. Nearby houses were deserted as residents were said to have fled for fear of being killed by the warring parties.

An eyewitness, Isaac Badmus who narrated the incident to The Guardian, said the union members accused the police officers of high handedness and torture of one of their members over a minor allegation. He added that the members subsequently resolved to burn the station.

He said: "I saw them when they were destroying the police station. I appealed to them but they did not listen. As the crisis worsened, the people pelted the police with stones but the police replied with gun shots.

A driver who was also at the scene said the four people who were allegedly killed by the police were not members of the NURTW but innocent residents who did not have anything to do with the crisis.

According to him, when our dead colleague was brought to us, we went to the police to show them what they had caused. But instead of them to douse the tension, they worsened matters. They entered into houses and brought out the occupants and mistook them for demonstrators.

"Unfortunately, those killed were not our members.

Some of the residents who spoke under anonymity alleged that the policemen capitalized on the prevailing violence to loot shops.

They alleged that the policemen forced doors open and also snatched handsets from residents.

While confirming the incident, the state Police Commissioner, Mr. Udom Ekpoudom, said it was the members of the NURTW that first opened fire on his men, which forced them to retaliate.

"The NURTW members attacked my men and burnt down the station. The OC on duty was attacked and seriously wounded. Now, he is in coma. They alleged that their colleague who was detained died in detention. But it was not so. He did not die in the cell so why are they accusing my men and matcheting them?" he queried

Meanwhile, security has been beefed up around the area as a detachment of security operatives were drafted to the scene while a police Armored Personnel Carrier (APC) was seen patrolling the deserted town.

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