

One dies as gunmen attack Abia governor's convoy

GUNMEN yesterday engaged the convoy of the Abia State Governor Theodore Orji in a fierce battle on the Aba-Port Harcourt Expressway.

The governor was however not in the convoy when the incident occurred at 7.45 a.m. in Ngwainyiekwe in Ugwunagbo Local Council.

All the officials of the state government in the convoy were said to have escaped unhurt but unconfirmed reports said that an employee of a telecommunications firm was wounded while a bus conductor was killed in the crossfire

between Orji's security aides and the bandits.

In a reaction to the incident, Orji said that he was the target. According to him, the plan to assassinate him had long been hatched, adding that those behind the plot had been disappointed.

Orji's aides and some senior government officials were heading to the Port Harcourt Airport to bring him to Umuahia, the state capital. He had been out of the state for two weeks.

The governor, who was accompanied by his wife, Mercy, described the inci-

*From Gordi Udeajah,
Umuahia*

dent as a clear assassination attempt on him.

An official of the state in the said convoy said the incident occurred "when the governor's team ran into the gunmen that were in a robbery operation. Those who laid ambush opened fire on the security men in the convoy, who retaliated in exchange of fire that lasted for about 15 minutes."

The source said that the gunmen operated with superior weapons, which compelled convoy crew to run for safety into nearby

bushes while the villagers allegedly looted the abandoned vehicles in the convoy.

A casual worker with a telecommunications company, he said, was wounded while a bus conductor was killed, adding that the gunmen numbered about 10.

When he arrived at the scene of the attack, Orji said: "This is no armed robbery at all. I don't see why those people will start shooting at every car in the convoy. Is the governor's convoy a bullion van that carries money? No! This is an attempt to assassinate

me.

"Security reports indicate that they have planned this for a long time and they have executed it. I always tell people that I have a divine mandate. Whenever they plan evil for me, God always showed me a window to escape. I have a court case at the Appeal Tribunal with my opponents but they don't want to wait to allow the justices of integrity to look into the case and then decide and tell us the truth. They know what will happen thereafter. But their plan will always

fail.

"The people should have confidence in our government. All those involved in the attack will get their reward one way or the other because when you plan evil, for someone, evil must come back to you."

At the Government House Press Centre, the Information, Culture and Tourism Commissioner, Chief Ralph Egbu, told journalists that "the governor narrowly escaped assassination attempt and we feel sad. Those responsible for it did not mean well for the state.