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Seven die in Benue communal crisis

From Simeon Nwakaudu, Makurdi

A COMMUNAL crisis at Ankpechi community in Ohimini Local Council of Benue State over a chieftaincy dispute has claimed the lives of seven persons, while more than 500 people have been displaced in the area.

Also, more than 50 houses in the community were burnt by arsonists who attacked the homes of suspected opponents in the chieftaincy dispute.

The communal crisis started last weekend following the death of the former village head, causing two influential families in the village to struggle for the vacant stool.

The crisis became violent since Sunday, with no intervention from the law enforcement agencies.

Unarmed indigenes of Ankpechi village have been victims of dangerous militia operating in the area, without any protection from law enforcement agents who have stayed away from the community over the fear that the militiamen could transfer aggression to them as has been the case in most crises in Benue State.

When The Guardian visited some displaced persons at Idekpa, the Ohimini Local Council Headquarters yesterday, it was learnt that since the crisis started, the council officials were yet to visit the affected area as they were said to be in Makurdi attending a workshop organised by the Local Council Bureau.

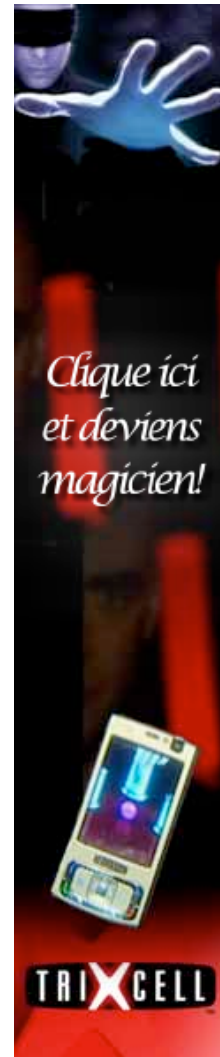
During the sitting of Benue State House of Assembly on Tuesday, the member representing Ohimini State Constituency, Mr. James Ochojila, alerted the Assembly on the killings in his constituency due to the Ankpechi traditional stool violence.

Ruling on the issue, Speaker of Benue State House of Assembly, Terseer Tumba, appealed to the police commissioner to, as a matter of urgency, deploy anti-riot policemen to quell the violence in the area.

The Speaker also urged the Benue State Emergency Management Agency (SEMA) to provide the displaced persons and other victims of the crisis with relief materials to cushion their plight.

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