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## Camerounian gendarmes kill 17 Nigerians in Bakassi

*From Anietie Akpan, Calabar*

**N**O fewer than 17 Nigerians have reportedly been killed by the Camerounian gendarmes in Bakassi, following the sacking of Nigerians in the peninsula.

To date, over 2000 Nigerians have been sent packing from the peninsula by Camerounian authorities.

According to the spokesman of the Cross River State Emergency Management Agency (SEMA), Mr. David Akate, "16 of the Nigerians were killed in the high seas while one died at the weekend at the returnee camp as a result of injuries sustained in the hands of the gendarmes through beatings and torture."

The treatment by Camerounians in Bakassi has been termed a violation of the Green Tree Agreement which says that Nigerians are free to remain where they are in Bakassi without any molestation.

Quoting the Secretary General of the Nigerian Union in Cameroun, Mr. Aston Arung, the SEMA spokesman said: "The Nigerians were killed by the gendarmes between September and November this year" and many more are being hunted down as they flee Abana, Atabong East /West and other areas in the crisis-torn peninsula.

Akate said one of the returnees, Mr. Okon Edet Okon, 45, died as a result of alleged brutality meted out to him by Camerounian gendarmes at Abana in the ceded area of Bakassi Peninsula to the Camerounians.

He said: "The deceased, who was among the hundreds recently harassed out of the peninsula, came to the camp with several joint dislocations and other complicated cases resulting from the inhuman treatment of the gendarmes."

According to Akate, shortly on arrival at the returnee camp at Ekpri Ikang in the new Bakassi about a month ago, Okon, who was a fisherman, said that he had escaped from the peninsula through the creeks leaving his wife and three children behind because the gendarmes sought his life for no just cause.

He said a gendarmes patrol team had accosted him at sea and demanded N10,000, which he did not have, following which the officers tore his fishing nets, removed his 40Hp engine, sank his boat and later beat him and abandoned him thinking

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he was dead. The wife, Nkoyo, and his three children joined him at the camp few days later having been assisted by some fishermen.

Akate, who was with the Director-General of SEMA, Mr. Vincent Aquah, said: "The deceased was interred at Obutong village in the new Bakassi. The burial ceremony which was at a very low key event was attended by the Director General of SEMA, the DPO Bakassi, as well as the Chairman of the Nigeria Union in Cameroun who was represented by the Secretary General, Prince Aston Arung, and some returnees."

Meanwhile, the wife of one of the people allegedly tortured to death by the gendarmes, Mrs. Atim Okon Asam, has given birth to a set of twins. Mrs. Asam, whose husband died when she was about nine months pregnant, is currently nursing the children at the returnee camp alongside other four children.

Reacting to the sacking and killing of Nigerians in the peninsula, Bakassi Freedom Front leader, Franklin Dukuku, had recently told The Guardian that they would go back and defend their people if the Federal Government could not.

"We found out that our struggle has no meaning because the Federal Government promised us that as soon as we withdraw our arms they were going to give adequate security for the waterways, but they did nothing. Everyday our people cry, complaining of having nowhere to stay; so it's a pity. Someday, if it continues like this for the next three months, I don't think we will remain in the city. We will go back to the creeks to defend our people from the hands of the Camerounians," he declared.

According to him, "the Camerounians always wrong our people, destroy their houses, they put fire and burn their houses, raped our wives, killed most of them, and about 250 of them are now in the displaced people estate in Ekpri Ikang.

"To me, I don't have to say anything, I will only give time to the Federal Government. If they cannot react or protect the people, we are going back to the creeks because I cannot see my people suffering while the Federal Government will say amnesty and they will not react. They are not doing anything definitely, it will draw me back to the creek and start the normal job as I was doing."

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