

# TheMetroSection

## 'Help! Hoodlums are occupying our houses'

• Displaced residents of Ikorodu community protest at Lagos Assembly, allege police have connived with thugs to sack them from their homes



A cross-section of protesters at the Assembly Complex...on Thursday

PHOTO: WOLE OYEBADE

By Wole Oyeade

It was the typical case of "a hunter that has become the hunted" for some residents of Imowo Nla community, along Ijede Road in Ikorodu area of Lagos State.

And on a day they would never forget, November 25, 2013 to be precise, at 2.00a.m., some hoodlums, land grabbers and policemen allegedly stormed the community in a violent raid.

There were violent bangs on doors and windows; scary gunshots gave them a rude awakening and helpless cries of both young and old rent the November night. It was a community under siege!

Barely an hour later, all residents had fled for their lives, escaping with degrees of injuries. Men of the Police Area Command, Ijede, Ikorodu - alleged to have accompanied the invading hoodlums - also took away no fewer than 21 residents and indi-

genes of the community in the night raid.

Till date, the displaced indigenes' homeowners and their tenants have deserted the community with all their belongings at the mercy of hoodlums who have taken possession of their houses. The community has well over 100 houses.

When the displaced residents showed up at the Lagos Assembly Complex, Ikeja, last week, it was all tales of sorrow, tears and grief.

Their placards read: "Will there ever be justice for us?"; "Governor Fashola save-our-soul"; "Right in the presence of police, hoodlums brandish guns"; "We don't know if we still have police as our friends; We are now endangered species in our house; I have not seen my wife for 11 days..."

Imowo Nla, like several communities in Ikorodu, has also been enmeshed in land disputes and violent conflicts. This particular crisis dated back to 2010 when an un-

named hoodlum allegedly killed an indigene in a violent rage. While investigation was still ongoing, another assassination was carried out; this time, killing two policemen in May 2013.

A member of the community, Idowu Olaribigbe Odusefo noted that the community had for so long had to cope with invasions of some hoodlums into the community, with several of those cases reported to former Lagos Commissioner of Police (CP), Yakubu Alkhali.

Matters, however, got to a head in 2010, when the hoodlums trooped into the community, "hired cultists, held meetings and disturbed our peace with gun shots."

Among the invaders were some indigenes that make a living out of land grabbing.

Odusefo said: "Many of the residents that could not cope fled to the town. During a carnival, they killed a boy and police started

harassing our people."

"We wrote a petition to the then CP on the matter in 2011. Along the line, the criminals wrote counter petitions that the community was responsible for the killing. But the perpetrator was eventually arrested, coupled with the discovery of two AK-47 guns in his house. The CP also ordered that a police post be mounted in the community."

"On May 24 this year, these boys made a return into the community again and killed two policemen. We were told that Oba of Egbinland was involved in the crime. Both parties were caught and arrested. About eight of the boys are in Kirikiri Maximum Prison now; the Oba was recently released. Several members of the community went to the State Command in Ikeja to make statements as witnesses in this crime."

"But on November 25, we just saw that policemen came to the community around 2:00 a.m. and started arresting anyone they could lay their hands on. The following day, some of us reported to the State Commander. It took the intervention of the IPO, who recognized us as police witnesses, to have our people released after three days."

"The issue now is that the yet-to-be-arrested hoodlums who killed the two policemen have come back with the police to drive everyone away from their houses. We went to the CP; he said he would look into it, but since then, we have not seen any step. Criminals who killed policemen want to turn the matter against the community."

"These hoodlums are the ones occupying our houses right now, in company of the police. None of us is able to enter our houses. These are the only clothes I have been wearing in the last 10 days. Police are with them, drinking beer and enjoying themselves. This is the situation we find ourselves where witnesses are being turned into criminals," Odusefo lamented.

Isiaka Aborisade, 60, was also sacked from the community, after his house was destroyed. "The state government has to help us. All our people are outside now squatting or gone into hiding," he pleaded.

Bisi Yusuf, a member of the Lagos Assembly who received the protesters on behalf of the House, assured the displaced residents that the lawmakers would immediately look into their petition.

He urged the complainants to keep calm and return to where they feel safe, till the matter is addressed.

Yusuf said: "I can assure you that this House is yours and it will look into your pleas. We've heard matters of this nature and have been able to resolve it. This would not be an exception."

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Briefs