

National

# Scores feared killed in Ilaje, Ibeno clash

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Scores of people were feared killed and houses, boats and other properties estimated at millions of naira destroyed in a communal conflict between Ilaje and Ibeno residents of Ibeno in Ibeno Council of Akwa Ibom State.

A community source, who could not confirm the number of casualties, said both sides suffered losses.

Although the actual cause of the fracas is yet to be established, the source said the crisis started as a cult clash before assuming ethnic dimensions, adding that the Ilaje people, mostly fishermen, had started fleeing the community through bush paths, while their houses and tents were being looted and destroyed.

The Police Public Relations Officer, Odiko Macdon, when contacted, said he was not aware of the crisis but promised to find out.

He said: "I will find out, I'm not aware but I will find out."

Ibeno and Ilaje belong to the Ijaw clan in the Niger Delta region.

Other sources in the area said about 4 p.m. on Tuesday, two Yoruba men who were quarrelling over a woman, took their disagreement to the residence of an Ibeno man at Mkpanak

The owner of the compound asked them to leave his premises but one of the Ilaje men, alleged to be a member of a notorious cult group in the area, felt insulted. He broke a bottle and stabbed the owner of the premises. This provoked Ibeno indigenes, who surrounded him and beat him to stupor.

After stabbing the Ibeno indigenes, the Ilaje man reportedly put a call across to members of his cult group, mobilising them for a revenge against Ibeno indigenes, who beat him for stabbing one of their own.

The arrival of the cult members, who came to support the attackers, led to an all night fight with scores reportedly killed.

When policemen arrived at the scene of the clash, the officers were chased away with stones.

A Yoruba indigene, living in Akwa Ibom State, Oluwajuwon Ogunbiyi, a lawyer, confirmed the incident and described the situation as unfortunate, calling on the state government to set up a committee to investigate the crisis.

He said: "It is quite unfortunate that this crisis has led to loss of innocent lives and destruction of properties. The Ibeno community had been a good host over the decades to both indigenes; and non-indigenes, who have been living there in harmony without rancour.

"The state government must, as a matter of urgency, set up a committee to look into this crisis so as to ascertain the major cause. Perpetrators fanning the embers of war on both sides must be arrested immediately."

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