

Uproar over killing of 14 Imo youths in Awo-Omamma

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- **HURIWA, COSEYL condemn killing as Uzodimma gets seven-day ultimatum to resign or face mass protests**
- **Youths killed in Imo are bandits, Uzodimma insists**
- **Denies report of the 15-year-old girl pregnant in DSS detention facility**

Uproar, yesterday, trailed the alleged gruesome killing of 14 youths by Ebubeagu, a security outfit of the Imo State government on Sunday.

Already, notable groups have asked the state governor, Hope Uzodimma, to resign, be impeached or be prepared to face continuous mass protests from the youths until he quits office.

The Guardian learnt that the victims were reportedly returning from a wedding to their community in Otulu, Oru East Local Council of the state from Awo-Omamma in the neighbouring Oru West Local Council, when the security operatives opened fire on them.

The President General of Otulu community, Nnamdi Agbor and the Imo State Police Command confirmed the incident.

Yesterday, the apex socio-political youth group in the South East geo-political zone, under the aegis, of the Coalition Of South East Youth Leaders (COSEYL), gave Governor Uzodimma, seven days ultimatum to resign.

The group in a statement by its President General, Goodluck Ibem and Publicity Secretary, Okey Nwaoru, said the governor has “crossed the red line.”

Also, the youth wing of the apex Igbo socio-cultural organisation, Ohanaeze Ndigbo Youth Council Worldwide (OYC) and frontline civil rights advocacy group, the Human Rights Writers Association of Nigeria (HURIWA) have condemned the killing.

But the governor has said that from the briefing he received from the Department of State Service (DSS), they took the action because they established that the deceased persons were allegedly bandits who were trailed to their camp, not at a traditional wedding ceremony.

COSEYL, in expressing a contrary view, insisted that Imo Vigilante Group, also known as Ebubeagu perpetrated the killings, saying that they were saddened on hearing about the killings, describing them as “barbaric, villainous and senseless.”

COSEYL in a statement said it was enraged that the groom and nine persons who accompanied him to the occasion, were killed, lamenting: “The groom and nine persons that came with him for the traditional marriage at Awo-Omamma from Otulu community in Oru West Local Council of Imo were killed, while five other persons are from Awo- Omamma community in Oru East Local Council of Imo State.”

The youth group regretted that 32 other persons attacked in the incident, were in critical conditions in a hospital, stressing: “Also 32 persons who were viciously attacked in the traditional marriage ceremony by the Ebubeagu operatives are in critical condition in the hospital. Their survival is hanging in the balance and they depend on God to make it out alive.”

They alleged that the killings were tailored towards the next election: “The spate of unlawful killings by men of illicit Ebubeagu Operatives, a security outfit formed by Governor Hope Uzodinma is on an evil mission to kill all Imo youths in the state who he believes will challenge his re-election as governor come 2023.”

The statement described what was going on in the state as despotic and tyrannical and unacceptable, maintaining: “This is no longer democracy in Imo State but a despotic and tyrannic government whose sole aim is to kill the people at will while looting the resources of the state dry.

COSEYL called on the Inspector General of Police (IGP) Usam Baba, to step in, arrest and prosecute Ebubeagu operatives.

Besides, HURIWA in a statement by its National Coordinator, Emmanuel Onwubiko, carpeted governor Uzodinma for hastily dismissing as ‘bandits’ the victims of what he called a state-sponsored extrajudicial execution.

It also lamented that the National Human Rights Commission has been weakened and operationally destroyed and heavily compromised that it has not initiated investigations into the serial killings of Igbo youths by operatives of armed security forces and the Imo State-owned Ebubeagu security network.

HURIWA, therefore, asked the National Assembly to investigate this particular incident and identify the killers so the office of the Inspector General of Police and the Federal Attorney General can charge them for murder.

“What is lawful would have been for the Imo State government to investigate the killing, but sadly the governor even took sides before ascertaining what really happened. This is so cruel, inhumane, wicked, irrational and insensitive that the governor can dismiss the alleged mass shooting of Imo citizens on the excuse that they were ‘bandits’ even before any sort of forensic probe is instituted?” the group queried.

Reacting in a statement, the National President of OYC, Mazi Okwu Nnabuike and the Secretary-General, comrade Obinna Achionye, said they were saddened that the lives of promising young men were cut short by reckless Ebubeagu security operatives.

The statement read: “Our hearts are filled with rage over this mindless and reckless killing of innocent people by Ebubeagu security operatives. It is inconceivable that a local security outfit could just open fire at unarmed civilians for no clear reason. We are even sadder owing to the grave silence of the Imo State Government days after that brutal killing.

“Ndigbo are very concerned that nothing good has come out of the government of Hope Uzodinma ever since he came to power. It has been one form of crisis or the other and now this strange action by the government-controlled Ebubeagu. His reign has only brought sorrow to the people of the State.

“ In Ebonyi State, there have been reported cases of the use of Ebubeagu by State forces to settle scores; now, the onslaught appears to have spread to Imo State. This is totally unacceptable and should be condemned by all men of goodwill.

“We demand a private enquiry over this matter and though no life could be paid for, adequate compensation must be made to the families of the victims.”

The statement also noted that the continuous unprovoked attack on residents of Isi-Uzo Local Council of Enugu State by herdsmen can no longer be condoned.

He said: “We find it hard to understand why the security agencies cannot put an end to this mayhem, which has led to loss of several lives.

“The Ohanaeze Ndigbo Youth Council Worldwide, therefore, calls on Governor Ifeanyi Ugwuanyi’s administration to find an immediate end to this carnage. The primary purpose of government is to provide security to the people.”

MEANWHILE, Uzodimma has warned that the Imo State government under his watch will not be deterred by the antics of propagandists who are on a blackmail mission, maintaining that he would continue to protect the life and property of Imo citizens and residents.

According to a statement issued by the Chief Press Secretary and Media Adviser to the governor, Oguike Nwachuku, Uzodimma maintained that the deceased youths were killed in a camp in Awomama, not at a wedding venue.

The statement said: “Governor Uzodimma said that the government had been briefed on the incident by the Director of State Services in an interim report made available to members of the Security Council.

The Governor added that the DSS Director confirmed that his men carried out an operation in a Camp at Awo-Omamma with the assistance of their informant and not at a wedding place as claimed by the youths and that it was in the process that some bandits were neutralised.”

He continued: “While the Security Council awaits a detailed report on the incident, it is important that the public are wary of those using the incident as a propaganda tool to blackmail the Security agencies and the government.”

The statement went ahead to refute the report on some social media and conventional platforms that a 15- year- old girl was allegedly impregnated in the DSS detention facility.

The statement said: “Governor Uzodimma also used the opportunity to describe as a fallacy, the claim on the social media and section of the traditional media about a 15-year-old girl allegedly impregnated in the DSS detention.

“According to the Governor, a security report indicated that two ladies who were caught with bandits about six months ago have been helping the DSS in identifying and arresting other dangerous bandits in the State.”

“Incidentally, the so-called 15- year-old lady happens to be the girlfriend to a key gang leader of the bandits terrorising the state but on the trail by DSS operatives.”