

One killed, others injured as traders protest over sealed shops in Enugu

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Ogbete market

One person was killed and several others injured as traders of Ogbete Main Market, Enugu State, took to the streets, yesterday, in protest against the sealing of shops by the state government, due to non-compliance with Governor Peter Mbah's ban on sit-at-home.

The Guardian gathered that security operatives, who stormed the market, shooting tear gas, clashed with the protesting traders, resulting in casualties.

It was learnt that the traders decided to embark on a peaceful protest, following what they described as "tough conditions" by the state government to reopen their shops.

Secretary to the State Government (SSG), Prof. Chidiebere Onyia, had on Tuesday said that sealed shops would remain shut for one week.

He added that the shop owners were expected to produce current tax clearance certificates and receipts of payment of other approved levies as conditions for reopening the shops.

A source noted that it was on the heels of these conditions that the traders embarked on a peaceful protest. He pointed out that they were chanting anti-government songs, making bonfires along the road and other blockades around the market.

The development, however, turned awry when security operatives started shooting tear gas to disperse the protesters.

Clashing with the protesters, who had earlier stormed Enugu North Council headquarters, according to the source, security operatives shot one person dead.

Police Public Relations Officer (PPRO) for the state, Daniel Ndukwe, who confirmed the incident, stated that a full scale investigation had been ordered, assuring that developments, especially as it concerns reports of casualties being circulated, would be communicated as soon as possible.

Ndukwe said: “Normalcy has been restored at Ogbete Market and its surroundings, following the protest by some traders over the sealing of their shops by the state government. The initially peaceful protest was hijacked and made violent.

“We have pleaded with the traders and residents in the state to remain law-abiding, while using approved channels to express their grievances.”

MEANWHILE, the state government, in a statement, said the crisis in Ogbete Market arose when traders, whose shops were sealed, resorted to self-help by trying to remove the seals. They were, according to the statement, stopped by the market leadership, which led to the protest.

It said: “The ensuing confrontation resulted in a protest, which was infiltrated and hijacked by armed hoodlums and miscreants, who broke shops and looted traders’ wares.

“Attempt by security operatives to restore order was violently resisted by hoodlums. Government is receiving further briefings on the development.

According to the statement, investigation is already ongoing to unravel the circumstance surrounding the incident, including reports of casualties.

The state government, therefore, on residents to remain calm and go about their lawful businesses, as adequate security measures are in place to secure life and property in the state.