

State of emergency stalks Rivers as political thugs attack councils

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ARMED political thugs attacked several local council secretariats in Rivers State yesterday, prompting concerns that the Federal Government could impose a state of emergency if the situation is not addressed as soon as possible.

Five people were feared dead, and properties worth several billion naira were destroyed during attacks on six council secretariats after the police had vacated the premises.

Rivers State Governor Siminalayi Fubara said the coordinated attacks may not be over, alleging that other councils have also been targeted for destruction.

During an interview on *Channels Television's* Politics Today, Fubara acknowledged that the state crisis stemmed from a power struggle and that individuals were being mobilised to incite violence.

He stressed the importance of citizen engagement in governance rather than resorting to the destruction of government property that serves the public interest.

Fubara questioned the rationale behind damaging government facilities constructed using local council resources, underscoring that these facilities were established under the leadership of the previous chairmen. He expressed apprehension regarding the targeting of

- Five feared dead, many sustain gunshot injuries
- Tinubu orders Fubara, others to de-escalate tension
- IGP directs unsealing of council secretariats
- Fubara inaugurates Election Petition Tribunal
- Saboteurs behind coordinated arson, says HURIWA

numerous local councils for destruction and called for safeguarding the state's resources.

Suspected political thugs invaded several secretariats, including Eleme, Ahoada East, Obio-Akpor, Emohua, Khana, and Ikwerre, protesting the recently conducted local council elections in the state.

These individuals insisted the election winners, who Governor Fubara swore in, would not be allowed access to the secretariats, claiming the polls were illegal.

It was reported that the hoodlums fired shots within the council buildings, resulting in the deaths of at least five individuals.

However, President Bola Tinubu called on Governor Fubara, political leaders, and their supporters in Rivers State to exercise restraint and uphold the rule of law.

His intervention followed reports of arson and explosions in response to tensions after last Saturday's council polls.

Tinubu urged all political actors to de-escalate the situation and discourage their supporters from engaging in violence or destructive actions. He also directed the police to restore and maintain law and order immediately and stressed the need to en-

sure the security of public institutions.

The President noted that the judiciary could settle all political disputes, including the outcome of the election.

In Khana Local Council, Benson Ndoonee, the Assistant Chief Security Officer of Ken Saro-Wiwa Polytechnic Bori, was shot in front of the school's Rector's Lodge. The complex was used as the Khana Council's temporary liaison office due to the earlier police barricade of all secretariats in the state.

Ndoonee, a father to one of

the newly elected councilors in the area, had prepared to attend the swearing-in ceremony before the tragedy. The State Commissioner for Environment, Sydney Gbara, who hails from the area, confirmed the incident to *The Guardian*.

In Ahoada East Local Council, gunmen reportedly shot one person dead. The victim was said to be the brother of the Chief of Staff to the Government House, Edison Ebie.

Additionally, three individuals were allegedly killed in Oyiabo Local Council. The

victims, mainly youths in their early 20s, were gunned down during a sporadic shooting by suspected political thugs.

There were also shootings in Obio-Akpor Local Council shortly after the Chairman, Chijioke Ihunwo, inaugurated the newly elected councilors. Friends and well-wishers who came for the inauguration fled for their lives by scaling the back fence of the secretariat.

The hometown of the Deputy Governor, Prof. Ngozi Ordu, in Ogba/Egbema/Ndoni Local Council, was not left behind as protesters besieged the secretariat, using sticks and iron to destroy plastic chairs outside the complex.

This came after some protesters blocked the gates to stop the newly elected chairman, Mr Prince Isaac

Umejuru, from entering the premises.

One of the protesters in Onelga said, "The Rivers State House of Assembly, under Martins Amaewhule, extended the lifespan of the former council chairmen by six months. The six months is still running, and the governor woke up and conducted a hasty election. That's why we say we will not accept it."

A section of the secretariat complex in Eleme Local Council was set ablaze. The council chairman, Brain Gokpa, arrived at the secretariat with his councillors only to find the complex had been engulfed in fire.

A visit to the scene later showed youths using water to put out the fire, while the council chairman and some of his supporters, including a former council chairman, Orji Ngofa, were seen sitting in front of the burnt office of the newly elected chairman discussing.

However, the chairman said the destruction of the secretariat would not affect his efforts to deliver the dividends of governance to the people.

Also, the newly constructed Ikwerre Local Council secretariat was set ablaze amid sporadic shootings in the area.

Earlier, thugs chased away the council chairman, Israel Abosi, alongside his supporters by thugs, but later, a socio-political group, the Simplified Movement, moved in and displaced the thugs.

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Front row: Oyo State Governor Seyi Makinde (left); his counterparts, Bala Mohammed (Bauchi); Ahmadu Fintiri (Adamawa); Douye Diri (Bayelsa) and Sheriff Oborevwori (Delta). Back row: AbdulRahman Abdul-Rasaq (Kwara); Umo Eno (Akwa Ibom) and Siminalayi Fubara (Rivers) during the governors' condolence visit to Governor Eno over the death of his wife, Patience, at the Government House, Uyo... yesterday.