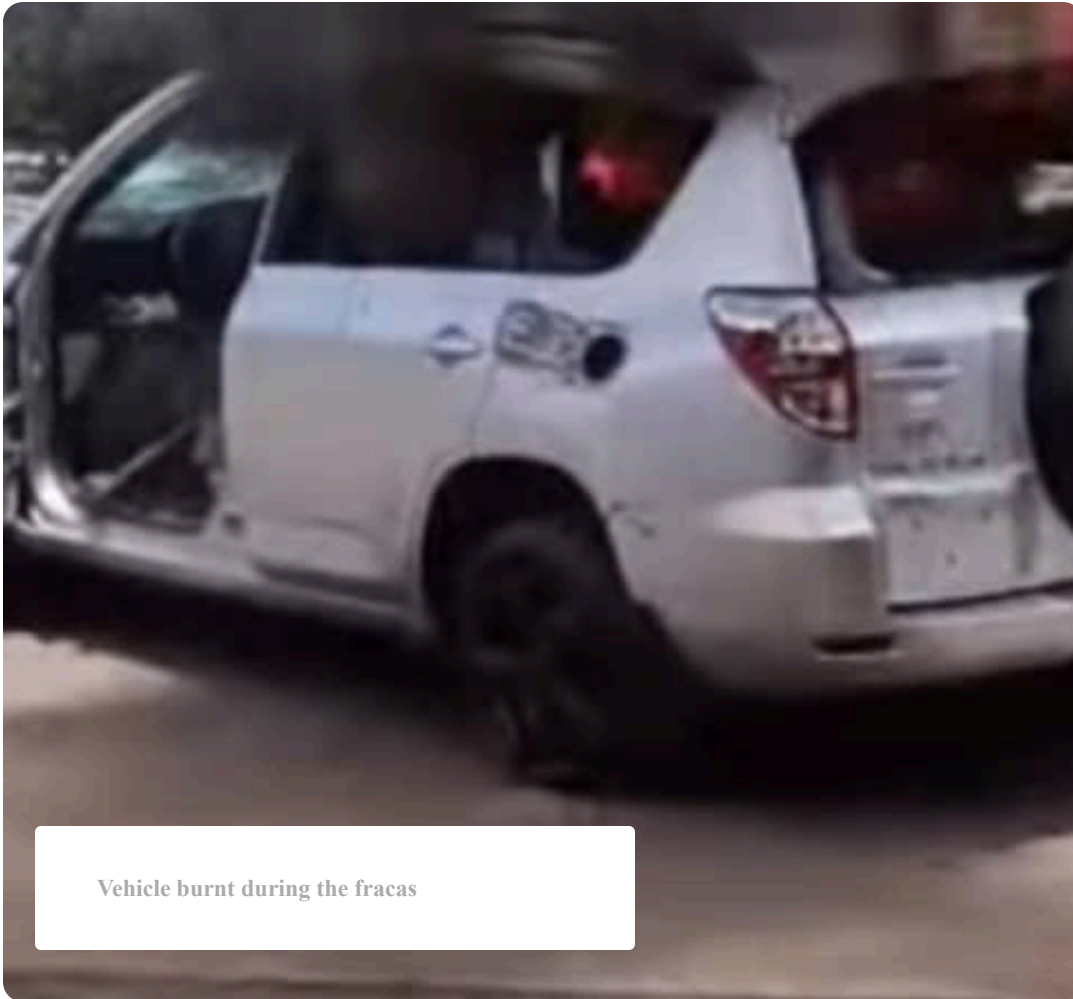


# Tension in Onitsha market as shooting by govt agency leaves traders dead, injured

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Vehicle burnt during the fracas

Tension gripped Onitsha yesterday following reports that operatives of the Anambra State government-backed Ocha Brigade allegedly opened fire at the Onitsha Main Market, Emeka Offor Plaza axis, leaving several people dead and others injured.

The victims were identified as Ebuka Orakwe, Orum Oluebube, Anthony Kosisochukwu, Ifeoma Ezema, Chinwe Igwe, 22, and two others whose names could not be ascertained at press time. Eyewitnesses alleged that a pregnant woman was among the dead.

The Anambra State Police Command, which confirmed the incident, however, stated that one female victim died on arrival at the hospital, while seven persons sustained gunshot injuries.

It added that the victims had been evacuated to the hospital and normalcy restored in the market.

Eyewitnesses said the incident occurred yesterday morning, sparking panic and outrage among traders and residents who fled the scene for safety. According to accounts, the victims, who had only set out to earn their daily bread, were shot by armed men reportedly working for the Ocha Brigade. The reasons for the shooting could not be immediately ascertained.

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A trader said: "This is heartbreaking. Four innocent people who left their homes this morning have been cut down in cold blood. Among them is a pregnant woman. Anambra people are now living in fear because criminals have been handed guns and uniforms in the name of government enforcement."

The Police Command, in a statement by its spokesperson, Tochukwu Ikenga, said police officers moved in to restore order after receiving a distress call.

He explained that an altercation had ensued between personnel of the Ocha Brigade, an Anambra State Environmental Law Enforcement outfit, and some traders, during which seven traders sustained gunshot injuries.

Ikenga added that the incident triggered unrest within the market but assured that normalcy had since been restored, with patrols and monitoring ongoing to sustain peace.