

# Ritualists On The Prowl In Warri

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As the Yuletide fast approaches with its attendant unusual crave for money, ritual killers seem to be on the prowl again all over the country. As rainwater never abandons the pothole, Warri in Delta State undoubtedly is one area the evil men would not want to miss, as they have swooped on children, pupils and students.

However, the people are giving them "their deserved wage". Barely a week after two suspected ritualists were roasted by a mob in Warri, another who attempted to kidnap two children on their way to school last week met his Waterloo in a similar circumstance.

But another suspect elsewhere in the city was just lucky, as the police came to his rescue, but not after he was beaten to a state of coma and now receiving medical attention in the government hospital in Warri.

Daily Independent gathered that the suspect, who was roasted with used vehicle tyres, attempted to kidnap the two school children when luck ran out of him.

A source at the scene on Ajamimogha Road, close to the popular Word of Life Bible Church, claimed that the ritualist, on sighting the pupils on their way to school, pulled out a short knife and threatened to stab one of them.

According to the source, the pupils raised alarm, which attracted passersby on the newly-dualised road. The suspect allegedly attempted self-defence with the knife, but reliable accounts had it that the act infuriated the surging crowd who overpowered him and set him ablaze, an incident that resulted in

heavy traffic jam for hours.

The police was said to have arrived the scene later in the day to remove the charred remains of the suspect.

Reports also had it that the intervention of the police saved another suspect, aged 33, in a different part of the city from being roasted.

In a swift reaction, the police had condemned the action by the mob against suspected ritualists by burning them to death, describing it as barbaric.

The Divisional Police Officer (DPO), 'B' Division Segun Fabunmi (SP), who confirmed the incident in his office, appealed to the residents of the area to restrain from taking laws into their hands while dealing with suspects in a case as sensitive as ritual killing.

Narrating what happened, Fabunmi disclosed that he received a distressed call of an attempt to set a suspected ritualist ablaze at Ajamimogha area and immediately mobilised his men to the scene, and on getting there, they discovered that the suspect had already been lynched by a mob.

On investigation, he was made to understand that the suspect was leading a primary school pupil outside the school compound and could not explain the relationship between both of them when he was accosted by the school security.

According to sources, the argument between them soon attracted members of the public who wasted no time in sourcing for fuel and matches to set him ablaze after he had been beaten to stupor.

The DPO further explained that while still investigating the incident, another phone call came that another suspect was about being set

ablaze elsewhere in the city, which made the police race to the location immediately to rescue the suspect.

Commenting on the incident, the Commissioner for Primary and Secondary Education, Dr Veronica Ogbuagu, decried the spate of school children being kidnapped these days and advised parents to be wary of allowing strangers have access to their wards.

She expressed dismay at the rate students and pupils were being kidnapped these days.

"Lives of our children should be guaranteed. Pupils should not talk to strangers; they should not go to school or return from school in company of others and they should not accept things from strangers.

"The police should also be on alert; students in higher institutions, who stand along the roads to solicit lift, should be very careful. Every responsible student should go to the motor park and board a vehicle," she warned.

The commissioner also announced that very soon the ministry will come up with a jingle to educate the public as well as teach safety in schools because of ritualists that are now on the prowl.

Meanwhile, the police in Oleh have intercepted three suspected pirates at Ikpide-Irri Community in Isoko South Local Government Area, who allegedly stole a boat at Ojobo River in Burutu Local Government Area of the state.

It was gathered that the suspects, who were at the Asaba-Ase Ikpide-Irri waterway dispossessing travellers of their belongings, were apprehended by the people of Ikpide and later handed over to the Oleh police at the bank of Asaba-Ase River.



• Udom Ekpoudom, Delta State Police boss

Items recovered from the suspects include speedboats, X75 Yamaha Horse power engine and 250 empty jerry cans.

When contacted, the DPO in charge of Oleh division, Gabriel Ughotor, confirmed the arrest, saying they had been transferred to the State Criminal Investigation Department (SCID) for further interrogation.