

# Discovery of Precious Stones Ignites Communal Clashes At Benue /Cross River Border

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The reported discovery of precious stones deposits at the border communities in Kwande and Ubanliko local government areas in Benue and Cross River states is reportedly responsible for the over three-week-old communal clashes between Ugee and Ikyurav-Ya people which has claimed about 14 lives, looting and burning several houses of the Ikyurav-Ya people.

However, traditional rulers of Mbaikper, Chigba and Mbakumka-Monkav people in Ikyurav-Ya clan of Benue State have said that their neighbours engaged them in unprovoked attacks.

The disclosure came as the Kwande/Ushongo member in the House of Representative, Hon. Chile Wanger Igbawua, paid a visit to the war-torn area to ascertain the problem, extent of damage as well as render some temporary food relief to the

hundreds of displaced persons.

But those who spoke with Daily Independent alleged that the discovery of precious stones on the Ikyurav-Ya part of the border sparked off the clashes, as the Ugee, who were reportedly promised millions of naira by expatriates interested in exploring the natural deposits, approached the Tiv owner of the land and requested to buy it.

It was further claimed that the owner, Ajai Ushwa, who was later gruesomely murdered by the same suspected assailants, declined to accept the request, claiming that the decision to sell the land is communal, as he alone cannot decide on behalf of his clan.

This was said to have led to encroachments on the land, such as cutting down and selling of the economic trees and erection of personal beacons by

the Ugee people.

Meanwhile, in the separate encounters with the various clans affected by the clashes, community heads, such as, Chiefs Tyodaa Unande, Akosu Uban and Iorlua Asom representing Mbaikper, Menev and Mbakumka-Monkav people, among others, also corroborated the same reasons by explaining to Igbawua that their Ugee Mbaabi neighbours were said to have discovered the precious stones deposits in Ikuyrav-Ya land and began gradual encroachment by cutting down economic tress and erecting personal beacons with the assistance of expatriates, who were interested in the mineral.

Unande said: "We have been having boundary disagreements between my people and the Ugee people. But the Federal Government surveyed the boundary years back for demarcation, but nothing has been done since then.

But recently, we saw our neighbours (Ugee) passing with white men through our land to the border. But we didn't bother.

"Thereafter, we noticed that they had cut and sold all our economic trees right into our land and again went ahead to plant beacons. And we came to discover that they were interested in a sizeable portion of our land, because of something they said was underground. We saw the encroachment as strange. So, we now sent a delegation to the Ugee chief, to know why they have not allowed the demarcation to be done before planting the beacons and cutting down our trees?

"The chief actually apologised to us and said, since we are offended by what they are doing, he will tell his people to stop. This was a peaceful meeting and we thought the Ugee chief said this from the bottom of his heart, not knowing that they were going to

attack us two days later."

The chief added that the Ugee people thereafter launched an onslaught on them at about 4am and continued the night raids for days, killing, burning and looting the border settlements on the Benue side, saying even their farms had been destroyed.

Igbawua, who donated 30 bags of rice, 15 bags of guinea corn, 20 litres of palm and groundnut oil, cartoons of soap and other food items to the displaced victims, sympathised with them and thanked them for not choosing the option of reprisals. He appealed for calm and patience for government to wade into the crisis.

The lawmaker promised to get in touch with the state and Federal governments, security agencies, the National Boundary Commission as well as raise a motion on the floor of the House to explore every possible way of amicably resolving the crisis.