

Owerri Boils As Okorocha Relocates Ancestral Market

** Ohaji/Egbema Disassociate From Eke Ukwu Market Demolition*

By **Anolu Vincent and Folake Shokoya** - August 27, 2017

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The Owerri capital city yesterday turned into a battlefield between indigenes of the town and security personnel, with scores of residents of the city seriously injured by stray bullets.

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While three persons lost their lives in the melee, several others injured were rushed to the Federal Medical Centre (FMC) for urgent medical attention.

Nurses at the centre could not respond to questions by our correspondent as one of them said, "My friend, as you can see, we are busy trying to save life. What else do you want to hear from us?"

Trouble erupted when a combined team of the police, army, DSS, NSCDC and those of the Imo security network stormed the market situated on the ever-busy Douglas road with bulldozers to effect the relocation of the market to Egbeada, in the Mbaitoli council area as directed by the state government.

However, no sooner had the security agents arrived, than the already mobilised combatant youths of the town called the bluff out of them.

Armed with dangerous weapons and chanting solidarity songs with placards bearing various inscriptions, which conveyed their opposition to the relocation, the restive youths began to hurl missiles on the security agents who did not dally to respond accordingly.

In the crossfire ensued, scores of individuals sustained bullets wounds just as one of them who was taken to the FMC was later confirmed dead and the body deposited in the morgue.

Expectedly, the crisis paralysed commercial activities and vehicular movements, thereby forcing a number of individuals to trek long distances before getting to their destinations, even as security was beefed up in all strategic points within the city. An eyewitness told Sunday INDEPENDENT that one Sabastine Oparaku of the Christian Pentecostal Mission (CPM) was relaxing in his palour at No 5/7 Douglas road by Njemanze street when all of a sudden a bullet pierced through the front door of his house and hit him.

President General of the Owerri Community Assembly -Chief Felix Ngoka (AKA Akaraugo I of Owerri) told the INDEPENDENT in an exclusive interview that blood would inevitably flow should the state government enforce the much-publicised relocation.

"This is a matter that is in court and there is a subsisting injunction restraining Governor Rochas Okorocha from tampering with the market. We are therefore surprised that a governor who is supposed to be the custodian of the law is now teaching us, to disobey the law," Ngoka stated

According to him, the market, which situates on the ever -busy Douglas Road for over 200 years is both the identity and pride of the people, which was bequeathed to them by their ancestors.

“Owerri People are traditionally peace and law abiding and we are here to defend the court injunction, which has restrained Okorocha from tampering with our ancestral market. We are ready to lay down our lives to ensure that the market is not relocated unless the court rules otherwise,” he explained.

Ngoka, who dismissed Okorocha’s real reasons for his decision to move the market to Egbeada, in the Mbaitoli council area of the state as baseless, said that Owerri indigenes had all along done something to eliminate street/ road side trading in the town.

He regretted that elected representatives for Owerri municipal in the State House of Assembly and Owerri, federal constituency had chosen to demonstrate indifferent and nonchalant attitude over the struggle to save the market from the crushing hands of the Imo State government saying “our forefathers warned us that an unspeakable calamity would inevitably descend on us any day this market is relocated outside Owerri township.”

In a telephone chat, an indigene of Owerri who gave his name as Chinedu Nnamdi gave this narration: “Our youths are resisting Governor Rochas Okorocha from destroying our ancestral market because there is a subsisting court injunction secured by one of our brothers – Barrister Ken Njemanze (SAN) to this effect.

“Today, our youths came out enmasse to stop Okorocha from destroying a market bequeathed to us by our ancestors. The government came out with a large army of security agents who on arrival began a shooting spree and in the process injured many people. They have all been rushed to various hospitals for treatment.

“Aside this, the Deputy Chief of Staff (Operations), Engr. Kingsley Uju who is also the chairman of Bureau for Land came here with over 300 dangerous thugs, which he imported from his Egbema town that is notorious for violence and with the assistance of the police and the army, the boys went berserk and started shooting indiscriminately. We will resist the relocation of our market by Okorocha with the last drop of our blood.”

As at the time of going to the press, the police and the army assisted by the men of the Nigerian Security and Civil Defence Corps were still patrolling all roads and streets of the city,