

Sit-At-Home Order Cripples Business Activities In South East

**FELIX UKA;
SAMSON NWAFOR;
PATIENCE OGBO-
DO-IWUAGWU;
CHUKWUJEKWU ILOZUE;
ANOLU VINCENT;
UCHE NWOSU;
GLORIA ANAEZE**

ABAKALIKI / ENUGU / AWKA /
OWERRI / UMUAHIA / ONITSHA

The sit-at-home order declared by the Indigenous People Of Biafra (IPOB) for Monday, May 31, in commemoration of Biafran fallen heroes of the Nigerian Civil War recorded a historic success as business activities were grounded across the entire South-East region.

Residents of Ebonyi State complied totally with the order as there was neither human nor vehicular movement in the streets and major roads in Abakaliki, capital of the state and in sub-urban areas.

Markets, banks, schools, shops, etc, were shut in the state.

Public and civil servants

did not also go to work.

Some residents who attempted to defy the sit-at-home in the early hours of Monday were forcefully sent back home by suspected IPOB members on patrol in different parts of the state.

At Nnodo axis of Ogbaga Road, Abakaliki, suspected IPOB members reportedly mounted blockade to ensure nobody defied the order.

Eyewitness told our Correspondent that they burnt motorcycles and cars seen plying the Ogbaga road.

It was further gathered that policemen later came to the scene and engaged them in a fierce gun battle, which heightened tension in the area.

Unconfirmed reports said a policeman was killed as well as four suspected IPOB members in the clash.

Similarly, the ancient city of Enugu was a ghost area as residents deserted major streets.

Our correspondent reports that offices, banks, shops, schools and markets wit-

nessed a lock down as no one was seen in the street except security personnel who had taken over the city.

Busy roads like New Haven, Ogui Road, Holy Ghost Main Market, Abakpa, Independence Layout, among others, were all empty as residents stayed back in their homes for fear of being attacked.

A resident of New Haven area, Ikechukwu Joseph, who spoke to our correspondent on phone, said that gun shots rent the area in the morning forcing residents to scamper to safety.

The order issued also recorded total compliance in Abia State as residents in the cities of Umuahia, Aba, and Ohafia stayed indoors, leaving the streets empty.

Our Correspondent, who monitored the level of compliance, stated that not even tricycle operators and *Keke* riders, who usually flout such directives, were seen in the streets.

Commercial banks and other financial institutions, in-

cluding markets, schools, government offices, hospitals, and clinics as well as restaurants in Umuahia, Aba, and Ohafia were under lock and key.

A human rights activist, Dr Charles Chinekezie, said the development was a signal that the people were not happy with the government.

He said the best approach to stop the agitation was for the Federal Government to de-proscribe IPOB and engage its leader, Mazi Nnamdi Kanu, and others in a conference table.

"Confronting this group with guns and bullets has been found to be counterproductive; what should be done is to engage them in a conference table and resolve the matter amicably," he said.

Like other South East states, Anambra State was shut down in compliance with the sit-at-home order.

Major markets in the state, beginning with Eke Awka in the state capital, Onitsha main market, reputed to be the largest in West Africa, and over

58 other markets in the state were shut just as vehicular movement was nil.

In fact, some market leaders had announced in advance that their markets would not open for business on Monday.

All the major roads – the Enugu-Onitsha Expressway and street roads in the major cities – were deserted just as shops and other business concerns were all shut down.

By Saturday, some banks' Automatic Teller Machine vaults had run out of cash because of the rush to withdraw against uncertainty.

In the same vein, Owerri, the Imo State capital, and its environs became ghost towns as almost all residents stayed indoors for fear of the unknown.

While all major roads and streets were virtually deserted by motorists and commuters, commercial activities fizzled out as markets, fast food centres, filling stations, popular joints for relaxation and comfort recorded zero patronage.

The hospitality industry

was not spared just as barrow pushers and *okada* riders were nowhere to be seen.

The few vehicles that courageously operated were subjected to thorough checks by security personnel who manned the roads and strategies points.

The situation was at variance with a statement earlier issued by the state government through the Commissioner for Information and Strategy, Chief Declan Emelumba, who advised the people to ignore the order and go about their normal businesses without fear of molestation.

In Onitsha, the order was also very successful as markets, banks, offices, mechanic workshops, among others, were completely shut down.

Also schools and local government secretariat were under lock and key as civil servants feared to report to their duty posts.

The flash points during times like this that include Nkpor junction, Eke Nkpor,

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Borromeo roundabout, Savoy, Upper Iweka, Bridgehead Market, Uga Junction, '33' Junction, Ogbomanu, Ochanja Roundabout, among others, were completely deserted.

Police Confirm Death Of One

On a tragic note, the Ebonyi State Police Public Relations Officer, PPRO, DSP Loveth Odah, confirmed the death of a hoodlum during a gun battle with the police.

She explained that some hoodlums were intimidating and forcing people to comply with the sit-at-home directive and had to be stopped.

She said that the hoodlums were molesting motorists and motorcycle operators, threatening them, and shooting sporadically into the air to scare people from engaging in normal activities.

DSP Odah noted that the police had secured the area and embarked on a "show of force"

to maintain law and order in the state.

According to her, "One of the hoodlums lost his life when they opened fire on our men."

"People were going about their legitimate businesses and activities in the area but the hoodlums were distracting and forcing them to obey the IPOB sit-at-home directive."

"They blocked some axis in the metropolis, collecting motorcycles and burning them."

IPOB Celebrates South East Gobs

In celebration of the success of the order and for the first time in recent memory, the IPOB thanked governors of the South East and others for making the lockdown successful.

The group said in a statement by its media and publicity secretary, Emma Pow-erful, that "the huge success

recorded in the sit-at-home order has further demonstrated that with unity we can actualise Biafra sooner than expected".

It added: "We, therefore, encourage all Biafrans to remain resolute in our struggle for self determination, which is our fundamental right."

The group said it was delighted that "this year's sit-at-home order in honour of our fallen heroes recorded 100% success throughout Biafra land".

For this reason it very warmly commended "Biafrans, South East governors, Gov. Ifeanyi Okowa, friends and lovers of Biafra freedom who made the exercise a huge success".

It said the unprecedented success and total compliance that greeted the exercise had sent panic waves down the spine of the oppressors and

that it was only now that they understood how prepared IPOB was in its irrevocable resolve to restore Biafra Republic.

It continued: "We immensely thank the people of Akwa Ibom, Cross River, Anambra, Abia, Delta, Imo, Edo, Rivers, Bayelsa, and Kogi States, as well as Igbanke, Idoma, and Igede people for being part of the success story."

"We equally extend our appreciation to our brothers and sisters in Ambazonia for their wonderful support."

"We cannot thank the Biafran Diaspora community enough for their inestimable contributions in our struggle for independence."

"Biafrans in Diaspora did us proud on Sunday, May 30, when they trooped out in their thousands to celebrate the Biafra Day in their respective host countries. We are very

proud of you all."

Gunmen Kill Former Enugu High Court Judge

Meanwhile, it was revealed that the man who was killed on Sunday evening at Garden Avenue, beside Diagnostics Centre, by Ebeano Tunnel, Enugu, by gunmen was former judge of Enugu State High Court, Justice Stanley Nnaji.

It was learnt that the deceased, who hailed from Isi-Uzo Local Government Area of Enugu State, was dragged down from his Mercedes SUV by unknown gunmen who shot him and drove out with his car.

Our correspondent reports that Justice Nnaji was rushed to Parklane Teaching Hospital Emergency room where he was certified dead.

The Enugu State Police Command, which confirmed

the incident, assured that the culprits would be arrested.

In a statement made available to journalists by the Public Relations Officer of Enugu State Police Command, Daniel Ndukwe, the police said: "The Commissioner of Police, Enugu State Command, CP Mohammed Ndatsu Aliyu, has ordered the launch of a full-scale manhunt of yet-to-be identified armed assailants, alleged to have trailed and shot dead an unidentified man driving in a Mercedes Benz Jeep, which they carted away, along Ebeano Tunnel, Enugu, on Sunday, May 30, 2021 at about 1700hrs."

"The victim, whose true identify is yet to be known, was rushed to the hospital, where he was confirmed dead by doctors on duty and deposited in the mortuary for autopsy."