

Police confirm five dead, 41 houses razed in Anambra clash

FIVE persons were confirmed killed and 41 houses burnt in a communal crisis that rocked Osile, Ogbunike, Oyi Local Government Area of Anambra State.

Several police officers were wounded in the clash between the police and gun-wielding youths in the village, the state Police Commissioner, Mr John Haruna said.

The crisis culminated in the arrest of the traditional ruler of the community, Igwe John Ositadimma Umenyiora by security operatives.

The Vice-Chancellor (VC) of Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka (NAUA), Professor Olochi Okafor, who is a native of the town, has given kudos to the state police command for their quick intervention in the crisis, adding that the burning of the houses by the youths of the community was targeted at buildings owned by the prominent citizens of the town.

From Nwanosike Onu, Awka

However, the State Governor, Mr. Peter Obi who visited the scene over the weekend promised to set up a judicial panel of inquiry to investigate the causes of the crisis.

The panel, he said, would be set up within one week, adding that anybody found involved in the mayhem would be severely dealt with by the government.

However, according to the state Police Public Relations Officer (PPRO), Mr. Fidelis Agbo, a Deputy Superintendent (DSP), about 13 persons, including Umenyiora, have been arrested by the police in connection with the crisis.

Last week, it was alleged that Umenyiora instigated some uninformed youths to unleash mayhem in the town where about seven houses were burnt and one person killed over commu-

nal land owned by the village and the Nnamdi Azikiwe University Osile Limited (NAUSIL).

It was gathered that the land which spreads over 30 acres, was given to the monarch in 1977 by the village on the agreement that he would develop the place within five years on payment of N500 annually for a 99-year lease.

But things took a different turn when instead of the 30 acres, persons close to the monarch allegedly surveyed and registered at Enugu about 45.836 hectares of Osile village land.

Okafor, yesterday, told reporters that the company jointly owned by the village and NAUSIL which produces bottled water, had its operations almost stopped by the monarch on the allegation that he (Okafor) was deceiving the people about the company. He claimed the monarch said the firm was his

(Okafor's).

On the other hand, Okafor said that the school and the village had spent over N150 million on the company which was his (Okafor's) own way of bringing development to the people, while another set of equipment worth about N35 million had been purchased for the company.

Meanwhile, over 300 police personnel had been deployed to the village by the police commissioner to quell any further breakdown of law and order at Ogbunike.

Governor Obi promised to build a new house for the 90-year old Fredric Isiuza and his 88-year old wife whose houses were burnt by the rampaging youths.

Meanwhile, Nnamdi Azikiwe University (NAU) Students' Union Government (SUG), reacted to the destruction of property, including NAUSIL, by the Osile youths, adding that they would not fold their hands and allow the company built with the students' levy be further tampered with by anybody.