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'It was face-to-face with terror'

👤 Posted by: WALE AJETUNMOBI 📁 in Campus Life 🕒 14 hours ago

It was a bloody day at Ekosodin, a host community of the University of Benin (UNIBEN), last Thursday. Seven persons were killed in a clash between indigenes of the community and students suspected to be cultists. The Edo State government has imposed a curfew on the area to restore peace. WALE AJETUNMOBI reports.

Ekosodin, a residential neighbourhood close to the main campus of the University of Benin (UNIBEN), is always lively. It is mostly populated by students. With the ongoing examination at the university, movement in and out of the community has been hectic.

Last Thursday, the peace of Ekosodin was shattered as guns boomed at 7pm. There was pandemonium. Residents ran for dear lives to escape being hit.

It was gathered that some suspected cult members and Ekosodin indigenes engaged in gun battle. When the dust settled three hours later, seven people including five students and two indigenes of the town had been killed.

CAMPUSLIFE gathered that the fight followed a misunderstanding between one Mr Lawrence, an indigene, and a graduating student with the nickname, London Boy, who was said to be a suspected cult member.

Lawrence, it was gathered, almost hit London Boy with his car on Edo Street in Ekosodin. It was learnt that London Boy and his friends were holding an "after-convocation party" on the street when Lawrence drove by.

London Boy was said to have accused Lawrence of reckless driving.

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London Boy: "Old boy, you won jam me with your tokunbo car? Abi them send you come?"

Lawrence : "Yes, I won jam you; you no sabi talk abi? Who you be for this Ekosodin sef? Here na your papa house? Na road side them for dey hold party?"

According to an eyewitness, an infuriated London Boy slapped Lawrence, who retaliated, leading to an exchange of blows. CAMPUSLIFE learnt that passers-by tried to separate them.

The eyewitness said: "Mr Lawrence went to gather his fellow indigenes and went to disperse students at the party. London Boy and his gang went to Mr Lawrence's house, but they did not meet him. His pregnant wife was beaten to a pulp."

When Lawrence was informed, he was said to have mobilised more Ekosodin residents, who came out with cutlasses, guns, broken bottles and other sharp objects, chanting: "All cultists must leave Ekosodin", "The cultists have crossed their boundaries", "We are tired; they must go".

Guns boomed for several hours. Students, who were caught in the crossfire, ran back to the campus. But, some Ekosodin indigenes blocked the access gates, leaving the fleeing students to run into the bush.

The armed indigenes, it was learnt, ransacked the students' hostels in the community, searching for London Boy and his gang.

During the clash, petty thieves looted supermarkets in the community and students' properties.

The first names of two of the dead students were given as Kpove and Pedro. The identities of other victims could not be ascertained.

The university's rear gate was barricaded till noon of Friday by the community. UNIBEN security officers forced the gate open but the indigenes overpowered them and shut it again. Students trekked to the Benin-Lagos Expressway, where they took buses to Ugbowo to access the campus through the main gate.

Following the fracas, the management cancelled all papers slated for Friday.

The Dean of Students' Affairs (DSA), Prof V.E. Omozuwa, went to Ekosodin with the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Administration), Prof Lawrence Ezemonye, on Friday, to assess the situation. He pleaded with the students to remain calm and urged the community to embrace peace.

Omozuwa was booed by the angry students, who accused him of neglect, when he wanted to address them. He promptly left with Ezemonye

"The DSA is a wicked man; he has never visited us for once. All he does is to sit in his office and bark orders. I wonder why he was made the Dean, because the man is totally anti-student," a student said.

Students relived their ordeal during the fracas. Timothy Osarogiwa said: "The incident was a sad experience I don't pray to witness it again. I thought the end has come. I was in a barbing saloon charging my phone when the fight started. I ran out in fear but when I got into my room, bullets hit the roof. I quickly called my roommates in school not to leave the campus. My phone rang continuously because my parents were calling to know my whereabouts. All through the night, my parents kept calling to know if I was safe."

A final year Law student, who did not give his name, said: "I have stayed in Ekosodin for five years and this is the worst incident I have experienced. We used to witness cult clashes but this time around, it was community versus students. I was returning from school and when it happened. I saw people armed with guns, cutlasses and broken bottles. I ran back to the school gate. When I got there, I discovered that the gate, which I passed a few minutes ago, had been locked and barricaded by some indigenes. I hid myself in the bricks. I prayed to God not to let stray bullet hit me where I was hiding. It was face to face with terror."

A student, Unity Obuse, who was in church when the fight started, said: "Students ran into the church for safety. When we heard gunshots, we stopped the service immediately."

A grocery shop owner, who simply identified herself as Madam Iyabo, said: "I was attending to a customer when I heard gunshots. I locked up my shop and [Translate](#) remaining goods outside. I slept in the shop till the next morning. When I opened the shop the next day, some of the goods I left outside had been carted away. But this does not bother me, because I am alive."

Faith Ogbebor and Grace Eromosele, who are students of Agriculture, alleged that they were robbed by some armed men during the fight.

When our correspondent visited Ekosodin last Monday, the lively community was a ghost town. A dusk-to-dawn curfew has been imposed on the area. Many students have left their hostels to squat with friends on campus.



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