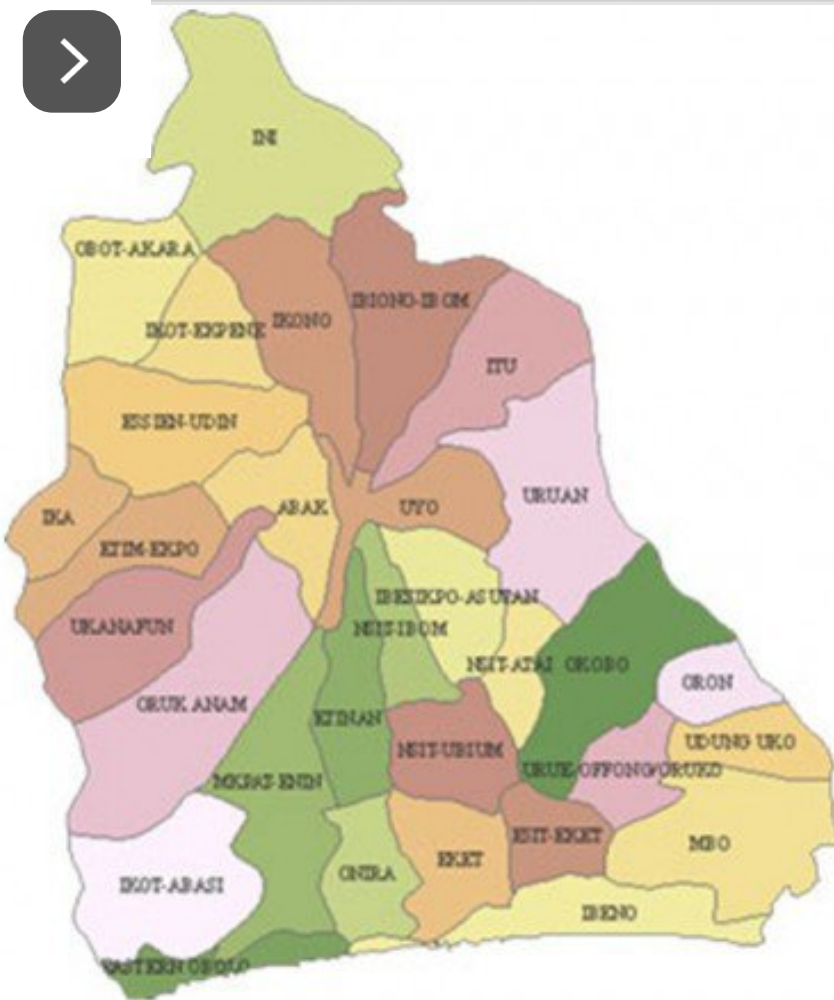


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April 15, 2015

Written by Joseph Jibueze

•**Govt, police: Allegations are false**

More facts emerged yesterday on how the governorship election in Akwa Ibom State was allegedly rigged.

According to eyewitnesses, there was no election because there were no electoral materials, including result sheets, in virtually all the local government areas.

Several polling units had either insufficient, or no electoral materials. So, voting could not hold. The materials were either not brought to the units, or were snatched by thugs working for the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), the eyewitnesses alleged.

In some instances, Electoral Officers would ask the ad-hoc staff to sign for the materials, but moments later, the supplies would be snatched by rampaging armed thugs. Anyone who challenged them was either shot or attacked, it was learnt.

But the state government through its Information and Orientation Commissioner, Aniekan Umanah, said the All Progressives Congress (APC) was crying wolf where there was none.

The number of those killed remained unknown last night but a source said: "Those who tried to resist the thugs were shot instantly and killed."

In Obot Akara Local Government Area, it was learnt that there were no result sheets. The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) ad-hoc staff allegedly connived with Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) agents to either have them snatched, or not supplied.

The source said there were no result sheets in virtually all the units in Ikot Ekpene, yet results were written and announced.

In Etinang, even before voting began, all electoral materials were allegedly taken away by thugs and PDP agents. Ballot papers were allegedly thumb-printed at a popular guest house in Uyo. The police were said to have done nothing when a report was made.

The Assistant Inspector-General of Police (AIG)

deployed to Akwa Ibom was said to have “sounded like a man overwhelmed” as the people were left unprotected.

“This was very, very organised. When we raised alarm, nobody took us seriously. We did not have elections in Akwa Ibom,” the source said.

It was learnt that the state government procured hundreds of buses for thugs, which they drove round the state, snatching electoral materials.

When they got to a unit, they would shoot into the air, disperse prospective voters, snatch the materials and flee unchallenged by security agencies.

One of the thugs was said to have shot and killed himself after mishandling an AK47 rifle. It was learnt that his colleagues left his body behind and drove off.

Apparently because more of the observers would be in Uyo, materials were released on time, and accreditation began, but between 1-3pm, the thugs were unleashed, moving from one location to another, seizing materials.

All Progressives Congress (APC) chiefs received hundreds of messages reporting lack of materials or their snatching by thugs from across the state.

Contrary to the Electoral Act, collation was never done either at the ward level or local government centres.

Every centre was said to be devoid of any activity when party chiefs visited. INEC’s office, usually full of activity on election days, was in darkness at about 9pm. The gate was shut.

It was also learnt that in the units where voting took place, ballot papers were far lower than the number of registered voters, sometimes as low as 300 out of 1000.

“What happened in Akwa Ibom goes beyond election. It was like a declaration of war against the people of the state,” APC governorship candidate in Akwa Ibom, Umana Okon Umana told reporters.

“We couldn’t find any location where collation had been done. There was no collation anywhere. We challenged the Resident Electoral Commissioner (REC) to take us to one place where collation was taking place, but he couldn’t.

“It was a coup against our people. It’s almost like treason. What happened in Akwa Ibom is a crime against humanity. It was a conspiracy of all state agencies against the state. The thugs operated unchallenged and anyone who dared them was shot and killed,” Umana alleged.

The former Secretary to the State Government (SSG) accused Governor Godswill Akpabio of entrenching impunity in the state.

“A man like Akpabio should be tried at the International Criminal Court (ICC). This was state terrorism, not election.

“I could not vote even as a governorship candidate. I don’t know why Akpabio was so desperate, or what he’s trying to cover,” Umana said.

He said he would have congratulated the “winner” had it been something close to an election in Akwa Ibom, vowing to challenge the “exercise” at the tribunal.

His party has called for the cancellation of governorship and House of Assembly election.

The APC chairman in Akwa Ibom, Dr Amadu Attai, petitioned INEC chairman Prof Attahiru Jega, listing

massive violations of the law.

He said: "In areas where polling materials were received, hordes of deadly armed thugs, escorted by men in police and army uniforms, stormed the polling units and made away with the election materials mid-way into accreditation..."

"In a meeting with APC governorship candidate Umana Okon Umana, the electoral officer of Nsit Ubium Local Government admitted that the election process in the area was marred by security failure which allowed PDP thugs to hijack election materials and take them to private homes for thumb-printing," the party said.

APC painted a gory picture of killings and injuries from eyewitness accounts of party agents and others. It said two of its members were killed in Ibiono Ibom when over 50 thugs invaded the area to cart away ballot materials.

"The PDP thugs similarly killed one of our members in Nsit Ubium. Three APC supporters were also killed in Uyo. One death was recorded in Uruan. One APC member was killed in Ini Local Government Area..."

"Given the widespread failure of INEC to supply election materials to most parts of the state, the rampant snatching of ballot boxes and the bloodletting by PDP thugs that characterised the conduct of the elections, we as a party hereby call for an outright cancellation of the elections.

"The results cannot be allowed to stand because they can never reflect the wishes of Akwa Ibom people," the party said.

Before the election, a group, the Concerned Akwa Ibom State Elders, petitioned the Inspector-General of Police

(IGP) Suleiman Abba, accusing the State Commissioner of Police, Mr. Gabriel Achong, of being partisan.

They accused him of “providing police cover to PDP thugs who invaded polling units and collation centres in the state to cart away ballot boxes and election materials” on March 28.

The group, in the April 6 petition, said: “The police were quick to arrest supporters of parties other than PDP and even ordinary citizens who dared to question the marauding PDP thugs and the high government officials who led them to polling units across the state.

“Over 100 people ended up behind barred in what was clearly well-orchestrated exercise to intimidate the public and supporters of political parties other than PDP.

“It is equally noteworthy that no PDP thug or sympathiser is in police custody despite the fact that many of them openly carried and used firearms and other dangerous weapons during the elections and in the presence of the police,” said the group.

It was learnt that a group of INEC workers, under the aegis of the Concerned Staff of INEC in Akwa Ibom State, sent a petition to Prof Jega, asking that the governorship and House of Assembly election be postponed on April 6, .

The workers alleged that electoral materials were “escorted” to the homes of PDP stalwarts instead of to the polling units.

They also alleged there were plans to reduce materials meant for areas known to be the strongholds of the APC, Labour and Accord parties.

The petitioners urged Jega to shift the April 11 election

because “the indices on ground posits that there would be a serious clash between PDP and other opposition parties which may culminate in loss of many lives and bloodshed.”

Alleging that the original copies of result sheets were “handed over” to a top government official, they demanded for the redeployment of the Resident Electoral Commissioner (REC) and all the electoral officers.

“No one should be surprised if INEC’s office in Uyo is burnt down to cover their tracks,” a source said.

But the government denied the allegations, describing them as false. Mr Umanah said: “Those things they are saying are false.”

He directed our correspondent to seek more clarification from the Commissioner of Police, even as promised to forward a “report” on the polls to our correspondent.

But no mail was received from him as at the time of filing this report.

When our correspondent contacted the state police Command through the Police Public Relations Officer (PPRO), Mrs Cordelia Nwawe, she said the police commissioner would speak on the issues “in due course.”

“The commissioner of Police will address the issues in due course and at the appropriate time,” she said.

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