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## Ofumwengbe/Okponha bloodbath: The inside story

Posted By: Osemwengie Ben Ogbemudia   on: August 28, 2015   In: Niger Delta   No Comments

Adams Oshiomhole

Osayuki Isaac Osifo, 26, will never forget August 4 in his lifetime. Prior to that fateful Tuesday, if a prophet had told Osayuki to remain in his community as trouble lurked in a neighbouring community, he probably would have stayed back and avoided the sudden twist of fate.

Again, if the Divisional Police Officer (DPO) of the area had taken seriously the intelligence report allegedly passed to him a day to the bloody incident by a member of Community Development Association (CDA) of one of the embattled communities, may be the crisis would have been averted.

In the same vein, if the youths of the warring localities had yielded the advice of the Police and their elders, they would have not found themselves in the current mess they are trying to get out from.

It was exclusively scooped that in response to the tip-off received by the DPO , he in company of some policemen visited the troubled site.

Having felt the security barometer of the environment, the DPO was said to have moved his men away with a request that leaders of aggrieved community should come and give formal complain to his office at Iguobazuwa town the administrative headquarters of Ovia South-west local government area.

Our crime reporter gathered further that hardly had the DPO left the building site at Okponha community when armed thugs converted the site to a battle field.

Commenting on the lawlessness that reigned supreme throughout the broad day encounter, the police spokesman in Edo State DSP Stephen Onwochei stated that “It was a free for all fight, single barrels, double barrels were fully deployed, shooting at each other, before we moved in seven persons have already sustained injuries”.

Osayuki Isaac Osifo, a year-two dropout student of computer-accounting, College of Education, Ekiadolor, is one of the said seven persons who sustained injuries.

He was shot on his right arm which was amputated to save his life.

The fatherless Osayuki now in agony at a private hospital in Benin City narrates to our crime reporter what transpired that memorable day of his life.

“About 8am or 9am on Tuesday, I went to check my site and I met my chairman at Okada junction in Ofumwengbe town driving towards my site, when I got there I saw some people of Ofumwengbe town exchanging hot words at a particular site.

“They were faces I recognise...., with eight together in one place so I told myself why can’t I talk to them to forget fight and let’s settle this thing amicably.

“In the process, before I knew it, somebody came out saying who is this man? Get him! *Fire am down!!* Before I knew it, from nowhere, a gunshot just passed through my hand. I looked at my hand; it was already like pieces . I fell down and from there I did not know what was happening.”

Osayuki continued: “The other one said that anybody who wanted to obstruct our work should be shot. May be they were seeing me as one of those who wanted to obstruct their work.

“But all I was there for was to maintain peace since the police have already asked us to go to the Palace.”

The youth Chairman of Ofumwengbe community, Edean Oshomon, stated that the attack on his friend

The youth Chairman of Okponha community, Edosa Ugiamen, stated that the attack on his friend by the youths of Okponha village triggered the communal crisis alleged to have left seven persons with bullet wounds.

He stated that his community and Okponha have a boundary dispute and both sides were advised by the police and traditional authorities to steer clear from the area pending when it would be resolved.

Edosa Ugiamen further stated that Okponha community jettisoned the advice and sold part of the land in order to raise money to fight their rival neighbouring community, Ofunmwengbe.

He alleged that his kinsman, Osayuki Isaac Osifo, had gone to the area that fateful day oblivious of the fact that Okponha youths and some heavily armed hired thugs deployed from outside the community had laid siege to the disputed area.

He averred that some youths of Ofunmwengbe swiftly rescued their kindred who was severely wounded.

The youth Chairman of Okponha town, Wilson Osaze, also alleged that some youths of Ofunmwengbe community, a.k.a Okada junction/new road, armed with guns and dangerous weapons attacked them at a building site during foundation laying in Okponha community.

However, a popular Benin chief from the area is said to have been fuelling the crisis.

The chief, it was alleged, had been harassing youths and elders of Ofunmwengbe community since the fracas erupted.

He was also said to have capitalised in on the crisis and ordered his workers to enter the forest in the area to explore mineral resources.

The Public Relations Officer for Edo Police Command, DSP Onwochei, stated that Ofunmwengbe and Okponha communities had been embroiled in a boundary dispute.

He explained that the police command had severally advised that they should channel their grievances to the appropriate government agency.

“They were warned seriously against taking laws into their hands, but last Tuesday, somebody from Okponha community was laying foundation within the area said to be disputed.

“The village head of Ofunmwengbe and one of their youth leaders are with us and as we speak, they are giving us useful information as to who and who went there to be shooting.”

He further explained that “our intervention in the matter doesn’t address the issue of boundary dispute but to maintain law and order”.

The police spokesman stated that arms and ammunition suspected to have been used for the attack had been recovered.

He promised that the police would not treat the issue with kid gloves as operatives are already on the trail of those involved in the invasion.

Ofunmwengbe/Okponha Communal fracas is among similar disturbances that have been witnessed and unresolved across Edo State every year.

On Saturday, November 22, residents of Aruogba community in Oredo Local Government Area saw hell in the hands of armed hoodlums who turned the locality into a theatre of war for several hours over the CDA leadership tussle.

No fewer than five residential buildings and six exotic cars were set ablaze as windshield of over seven vehicles smashed during the well- coordinated attack.

The panic and confusion that followed the violence caused many parents and children to run helter-skelter.

At last, one person died in the attack and shortly after, more killings have been recorded as the aggrieved parties continue to hunt themselves.

Amongst the victims was the acclaimed elected CDA chairman, Mr. Okoro Ogbaretin, who was ambushed and gunned down.

Ever since the crisis, community life has never be same again as many residents who fled their ancestral homes are yet to return.

The commissioner of Police in the state then, Mr. Foluso Adebajo, confirmed the arrest of nine suspects at the wake of the fracas.

He further explained that a gun and live ammunition were also recovered.

Will communal disturbances ever cease in Edo State?

The Adams Oshiomhole administration years ago constituted the State Peace and Conflict Resolution Committee led by Chief Eduwu Eghator.

Still, communal crises appear to have defied permanent solution as affected communities record collateral damages from time to time.

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