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## Five killed as violence mars Bayelsa election

Posted By: Shola O'Neil, Bisi Olaniyi, Mike Odiegwu and Precious Dikewoha, on: December 06, 2015 In: News No Comments



Akwa Ibom election crises

**•Four journalists escape death by the whiskers**

**•Card reader fails to recognise Jonathan again; rejects *Dickson, wife, mother***

The guns boomed yesterday in Bayelsa State as voters went to the polls to elect a new governor for the next four years.

Five people laid dead by the time the guns went quiet.

Four journalists covering the election were, however, lucky, having escaped death by the whiskers the previous night during an attack by hoodlums at Odioma, in the Brass Local Government Area of the state.

The two main parties in the election –Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) and the All Progressives Congress (APC) traded blames over the attacks.

The card reader again failed to recognise ex-President Goodluck Jonathan and his wife, Patience, at their first attempt in Otuoke.

There was a similar occurrence during the March presidential election which he lost.

Four of those feared dead were killed in Oporoma, Southern Ijaw Local Government area when a supposedly repentant militant led his men on an invasion of the community in the wee hours of the day apparently to disrupt the distribution of electoral materials.

Three of the invaders were reportedly killed as the Joint Military Task Force (JTF) tried to repel the thugs.

It was gathered that the spate of shootings forced many of the residents to stay indoor for fear of being hit in the cross fire.

“Several shots were fired to scare the people and pave way for the carting away of the election materials but the security operatives attached to the area were up to the task,” said one source.

About 45 suspects were subsequently arrested by security operatives.

Shooting was also reported in Brass and Nembe Bassambri.

In Nembe, a member of the Bayelsa State House of Assembly, Princess Ingo Iwowari, was reportedly

attacked and stripped of all her belongings, including cash.

The Bayelsa State Police Commissioner, Mr. Nasiru Oki, confirmed that arrests had been made and the situation brought under control.

Governor Henry Seriake Dickson who is seeking re-election on the platform of the PDP, said one of his supporters was killed while the flag bearer of the All Progressives Congress (APC), Chief Timipre Sylva, said four persons were killed by PDP thugs.

Dickson condemned the violence perpetrated in parts of the state allegedly by the APC that resulted in the killing of some persons during the electoral process at the weekend.

Speaking to reporters shortly after casting his vote at polling unit 5, ward 2 Oruerewari in Toru Orua, Sagbama local government area, the governor commended the people of the state for showing determination to exercise their franchise despite intimidation and harassment by the APC.

He said: "I have received disturbing reports of premeditated attacks on my party supporters in Twon Brass, and attacks sponsored by the Minister of State for Agriculture, Heineken Lokpobiri, Teco in Ekeremor town and another attacks on the PDP supporters in Oporoma resulting in the death of at least one person.

"I am not convinced with the steps that the federal controlled security agencies have taken in creating a conducive, safe and secure political environment for voting to take place"

Commenting on the epileptic performance of card readers in some polling units, he expressed unhappiness over the malfunctioning of the card reader as the machines was unable to capture the biometrics of his family.

"In spite of trials and assurances, you all saw that my fingerprints were not recognised, same for my wife and mother. So we have a serious problem as far as the so called smart card readers are concerned," he said and hoped that "we don't continue to portray ourselves as an unserious and fraudulent country, manipulating anything and everything."

The APC rejected the accusation and said it was the PDP that imported over 5000 thugs into the state to perpetrate violence.

The party in a statement signed by the Director Media and Publicity, Sylva/Igiri Campaign Organisation (SICO), Chief Nathan Egba, said "We have it on good authority that Governor Seriake Dickson imported over five thousand thugs from neighbouring states of Delta and Rivers state to cause violence in the election.

"The unknown faces now in most of the riverine communities of Bayelsa State have been terrorising the people with gun shots to scare people away from the polling units.

"The wave of attack has confirmed our fears and alarm earlier raised that Governor Dickson was the one planning to cause violence."

He named the affected communities as Oporoma in Southern Ijaw LGA, where the APC State Chairman, Tiwei Orunimighe, hails from, Nembe LGA, Brass LGA, home of the APC candidate, Sylva, and Ekeremor LGA, home of the Minister of State for Agriculture and Rural Development, Senator Heineken Lokpobiri.

"In Nembe-Ogbolomabiri yesterday (Friday), two APC members were shot until the Military Task Force ordered every resident to go into their houses and remain in-doors.

"In Sagbama town, headquarters of Sagbama Local Government Area, one APC supporter was attacked. Sagbama is the local government of Governor Dickson, who is the PDP candidate.

"In Oporoma, headquarters of Southern Ijaw Local Government, it took the Military force to repel the PDP thugs, who had planned to snatch the sensitive election materials. Four persons were reportedly killed in the gun battle", he said.

He said that on Friday evening it took the intervention of the Joint Task Force (JTF) to repel the thugs and whisked the former Governor and his entourage away.

"Four journalists on the train of Chief Sylva were missing in Odioma for several hours after the gun shots. It took the efforts of the JTF and local vigilante group to rescue the journalists from their hiding late night of Friday.

The journalists were Mike Odiegwu of *The Nation*, Sam Oluwalana of *The Guardian*, Simon Utebor of *Punch* and the newspaper's (Punch's) photo-journalist, Sodiq, who came to Yenagoa from Lagos to cover the election

cover the election.

"In Opolo town, the APC Ward 5 Campaign Organisation, Utovie Egba, was matchetted by PDP thugs, when they prevented APC polling agents from gaining access to the centre," he said.

He said that a few hours before commencement of accreditation of voters for the 2015, the country home of the Minister of state for Agriculture and Director-General of the Sylva/Igiri campaign organization, Senator Heineken Lokpobiri came under attack by gunmen.

He said some thugs suspected to have been hired by the PDP from Delta state stormed the residence of the minister at Ekeremor town, Ekeremor Local Government Area in the morning.

He said the thugs overpowered security men deployed in Ekeremor and made their way into the minister's compound causing mayhem with Senator Lokpobiri and others trapped inside the house.

He said: "While the security personnel attached to the minister were making attempt to restore the situation, the attack intensify as the PDP thugs said to be led by one Tolu Amatolo intensified attack and took over the entire community.

But the PDP said APC thugs also attacked its members during the election.

The party said the Special Adviser to the Bayelsa State Governor on Inter-Party Matters, Mr. Austin Adigio, and three other members of the PDP in Okpoama and Eweama communities of Brass Local Government area of the state were macheted in a bloody attack ahead of the election.

Confirming the development, the Director of Media and Publicity of the Restoration Campaign Organisation (RCO), Mr. Jonathan Obuebite, said the attack in Okpoama and Eweama was one among the series of attacks unleashed by the APC against the members of the PDP across the state.

Obuebite said,"We condemned the attacks on our members in Eweama and Okpoama communities. We call on relevant security agencies to investigate the incident and bring the culprit to book.

"Nobody has the monopoly of violence. If the APC-led federal government fails to put a stop to this wanton display of federal might and sheer brigandage and violence being unleashed on us by APC in Bayelsa State, we will be helpless if our members resort to defending themselves. And in that circumstances, the outcome will be too disastrous for the federal government to handle. The federal government should be alive to the responsibility of neutron that nobody, no matter his position, abuses his office to support lawlessness."

Officials of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), and electoral materials for yesterday's election were held hostage for some hours by rampaging thugs inside the headquarters of Southern Ijaw Local Government Council at coastal Oporoma, amid heavy gunshots, before the hoodlums were later repelled by military men.

INEC immediately sent a gunboat to Oporoma to evacuate the electoral materials and its officials to Yenagoa, in order not to endanger the lives of the staff of the commission, before the soldiers eventually overpowered the daring thugs, who had to quickly beat a retreat, but thirty of the militants were arrested.

Electoral materials earlier snatched in Ward 6 of Dickson's Sagbama LGA were later recovered by the police.

The card reader, again, failed to recognise ex-President Goodluck Jonathan at his Otuoke hometown in Ogbia LGA of the state.

The card reader also failed to recognise Dickson; his wife, Rachael, and his mother.

Accreditation for the election commenced early in Yenagoa, the state capital, but was delayed in other parts of the state on the strength of the violence by thugs.

The Bayelsa governor, who was accredited at 10:45 a.m. in his Unit 4, Ward 2 of his Toru-Orua hometown in Sagbama LGA, was very angry that the card reader did not recognise him, his wife and mother.

Sylva, APC governorship candidate was accredited at 11.41am along with his wife, Alayingi Silva at Eseni Square, Unit 4, Ward 4 Okpoama-Brass.

Sylva condemned the attack on Chief Heineken Lokpobiri's house at Oporoma by thugs.

He also picked holes in the many incidents of failed card reader, he, however, expressed optimism that having had a successful campaign he is certain of victory.

He said that the intelligence of JTF led to the arrest. He also revealed that there were infiltrations by

thugs of opposition parties from Delta, and Rivers State.

"We got security reports of infiltrations by PDP thugs but it seemed to be ignored by security owing to maybe conflicting reports.

"Here there is peace everyone is allowed to exercise his franchise. You can see that there is peace here.

"My card was read well but while on the line I noticed many people were failed by the card reader. I want INEC to work on this technology, it gives me some worry, but in all it is going well.

"The other party didn't want election from what we can see with the proliferation of thugs and violence. The Minister was attacked, he called me that his house has been attacked, we called for security reinforcement and he is safe now."

It was observed at Units 1, 2 and 3 of Toru-Orua, that youths working for the PDP stormed the area and chased away APC's supporters. At Dickson's Unit 4, Ward 2 in Toru-Orua, an APC supporter was beaten to coma for challenging the hired thugs.

One of the observers met at Sagbama LGA, Dr. Joe Okei-Odumakin, of the Women Arise, stated that the major problem in the area was the issue of card reader not recognising voters' thumbprint.

She said she observed that there was tension and anxiety in Sagbama LGA and other parts of the state, where she earlier visited with her team, while admonishing the electorate to continue to remain calm and be patient over the card reader challenge.

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