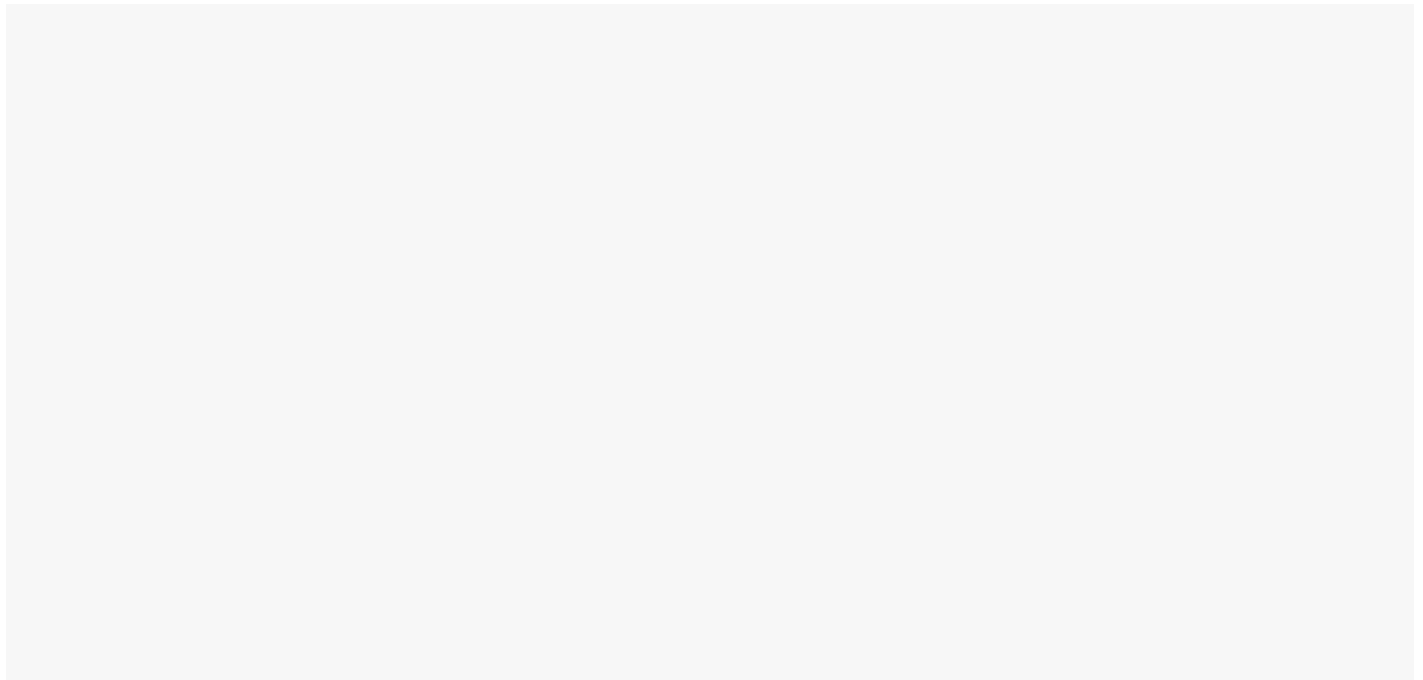


Ebonyi communal clash: Death toll now 40

• Council chair, lawmaker, others in custody as state imposes curfew

January 25, 2021 in **City Beats**, **News Update**

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By Ogochukwu Anioke, Abakaliki

Death toll in the Effium communal clash in Ohaukwu council area of the state has risen to about 40, it was learnt on Sunday.

A former Secretary of the State Government, Bernard Odoh, in a statement, said 10 persons were killed on Friday, quoting villagers and other information sources.

“Already, the natives have put the figures of lives lost to this unhealthy rivalry at over 40 while properties such as houses, shops and markets have been destroyed and burnt by rampaging rival youth groups,” he said.

“Information available mainly in social media domains discloses that about 10 persons had earlier lost their lives on Friday night while about 15 musical band boys who went about their daily business in the area were caught in the crossfire and murdered mercilessly by one of the opposing groups that were on a reprisal attack.”

Police claimed eight persons died in the violence, and that 60 suspects have been arrested.

Mr Odoh said many villagers have fled their homes and farm settlements.

But police commissioner Aliyu Garba insisted that seven persons were killed while no one was injured

His claims were disputed by many sources from the community and from Journalists who visited the community on the entourage of Deputy Governor Kelechi Igwe on Sunday.

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Bodies littered the community when the Deputy Governor visited the area on Sunday, his second visit in two days. Mr Garba arrested the council chairman, Clement Odah and the lawmaker representing Ohaukwu North state Constituency, Chinedu Awo over the violence on Igwe's orders.

Also arrested were some 25 other major stakeholders from the community including the Coordinator of Effium Development Centre, Sunday Agbo and his Effium South DC Counterpart, Eucharua Ogwale.

Mr Emmanuel Uzor, a former Chief Press Secretary to the Governor and currently the Special Assistant to the Governor on Market Development and his Counterpart in Charge of Parks Development, Emmanuel Igwe were among those arrested.

The former lawmaker representing Ohaukwu North state Constituency and Governor David Umahi's Special Assistant on Youth Development, Frank Onwe was also among those arrested.

Their arrest, it was learnt, was on the orders of Deputy Governor Igwe.

Mr Igwe had in a statement on Sunday invited the stakeholders and appointees to an emergency security meeting following the violence in the community on Friday and Saturday.

The meeting which took place at old Government House also had in attendance the Chief Judge of the state, Justice Anselm Nwigwe, who is also from the community, Secretary to the state Government, Kenneth Ugba and Commissioner for International Security and Conflict Resolution, Stanley Okoro Emegha.

The invitees arrived the Executive Chambers of the Old Government House venue of the meeting at 9pm and the meeting started with the Deputy Governor and Commissioner of Police in attendance.

The Nation reporter at the scene witnessed the arrest of the stakeholders.

At around 10pm, about 10 police vans entered the compound from the Police Headquarters across the road.

The police officers in the vans alighted and quickly surrounded the building where the meeting was taking place.

Moments later, the Commissioner of Police opened the door and ordered the policemen to take the invitees away except the Chief Judge, the SSG, Mr Okoro Emegha and a few others at the venue.

They were immediately taken to two waiting buses belonging to the Ministry of Internal Security.

They were driven to the States Police Headquarters building opposite the old Government House where they were detained.

The CP also collected their phones and handed them over to an officer with instructions to safeguard them.

He was heard saying the phones may be analysed as part of the investigation into the matter.

After their arrest, the CP, the Deputy Governor and other attendees entered their cars and left the venue and moved to Effium to witness the level of destruction.

Mr Igwe while addressing displaced residents at Effium Police station said the arrested political office holders, appointees and stakeholders will remain in police custody until they find solution to the crisis.



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