

Community lynches fleeing inmate as 85 return

A MAN who escaped from the Correctional Centre in Imo State on Monday was set ablaze in his community yesterday.

Angry residents of Umua-wom village in Ikeduru Local Government Area caught him while allegedly threatening to kill a family member.

The inmate, whose identity could not be ascertained as of press time, hailed from the nearby Ogwa community in Mbaitoli but grew up in Umua-wom, his maternal home.

He was said to have been involved in the kidnap of an Umuawom indigene. He was remanded for over a year.

On escaping, he was said to have gone straight to one of the families that testified against him and threatened to deal with the members.

It was gathered that he attempted to carry out his threat by attacking a member of the family with a gun.

Sources said a resident raised the alarm, prompting the villagers to pounce on him, setting him ablaze.

The spokesman of the Imo police command, Orlando Ike-okwu, said he had heard about the incident but was yet to confirm it.

Residents are worried about the likely increase in criminal activities in Imo.

On Tuesday, hoodlums attacked bank customers and snatched their money and val-

From Damian Durulheoma, Owerri; Precious Igbonwelundu, Lagos; Sanni Onogu, Tony Akowe, Blessing Olaifa, Abuja and Ogochukwu Anioke, Abakaliki

uables at gunpoint on Bank Road and Douglas Road, close to the Government House. One of the victims was robbed of N340,000.

The police seemed to have abandoned patrols, especially around Port Harcourt Road.

Residents of Uratta, Nekede, Naze, Egbu, Egbeada and Orji fear the freed inmates could seek hideouts in the communities.

At Nekede, a young man who runs a phone charging shop was reportedly attacked by one of the escaped inmates.

In Nekede, residents said die-hard criminals were celebrating their escape from jail.

At Uratta in Owerri North council area, it was gathered that one of the traditional rulers whose wife died in kidnappers' den hurriedly left his palace and relocated to Abuja after learning that the key suspect was in town.

At Akabo in Ikeduru Local Government Area, it was learnt that a returnee prisoner caused a stir as residents became jittery.

It was gathered that three suspected kidnappers of the wife of the owner of ABC Transport were to appear be-

fore the court yesterday, but were among those who escaped. It could not be confirmed whether they were among those who returned.

In the Egbu community in Owerri North, the mother of a three-year-old girl, who was sexually raped by one of the inmates, went broke down on learn that the suspect was back.

Uzodimma: 85 have returned, attacks sponsored

Imo State Governor Hope Uzodimma said nearly 85 of the inmates had returned.

He said some were reaching out through their lawyers on their intention to return to custody.

The governor said those who attacked the police headquarters and the correctional centre came from outside the state.

The governor, who spoke on *Channels*, claimed the attacks may have been sponsored by political detractors, and that he was preparing a report.

He said: "Hoodlums were hired from outside Imo State and they pretended to be IPOB (the outlawed Indigenous People of Biafra) to commit this crime and go away."

"So, it is not about IPOB. Yes, there are aggrieved IPOB members, but most of those carrying out these attacks were brought from outside Imo State."