

# Anxiety in Cross River community over manhunt for killers of suspected witches

•Elders flay alleged invasion by security agents

**P**ENULTIMATE week, Ndon Owong, a community in Odukpani Local Government Area, Cross River State, consisting mainly farmers and fishermen, made the headlines as some youths allegedly marked 15 women accused of witchcraft for killing.

It was gathered that five of the accused women were eventually killed and buried in a forest; a development that provoked outrage within and outside the community and caused the police to wade into the matter.

The irate youths reportedly abducted three of the police officers whose intervention prevented the youths from killing all the 15 women marked as witchcraft suspects.

The abducted police officers including an Assistant Superintendent of Police (ASP) serving under the Odukpani Divisional Police Station, Cross River State Command, were eventually rescued from their abductors while some elders and chiefs in the community invited by the police were detained and set free after a few days.

According to a source in the community, "on the same day the police freed the chiefs, six police vans loaded with officers entered the community and started destroying things."

Confronted with the fact that he was merely making an allegation, the source sent pictures of the alleged destructions.

He also disclosed that the community was irked by the destruction and had chosen five chiefs to take up the matter and defend their interest.

On the issue of witchcraft allegation and killing of five persons, another source from the community who identified himself simply as Paul, said that no one would say anything about that.

"The only thing the chiefs can talk about is

By Nsa Gill, Calabar

the destructions carried out by the police in the community," he said.

When contacted, the Police Public Relations Officer in the state, Irene Ugho, a Superintendent of Police, confirmed the killings over allegations of witchcraft, adding that they had two suspects in their custody and are already making progress in apprehending others fleeing suspects.

"Nobody can take the law into their hands. Our constitution does not recognise anything like witchcraft."

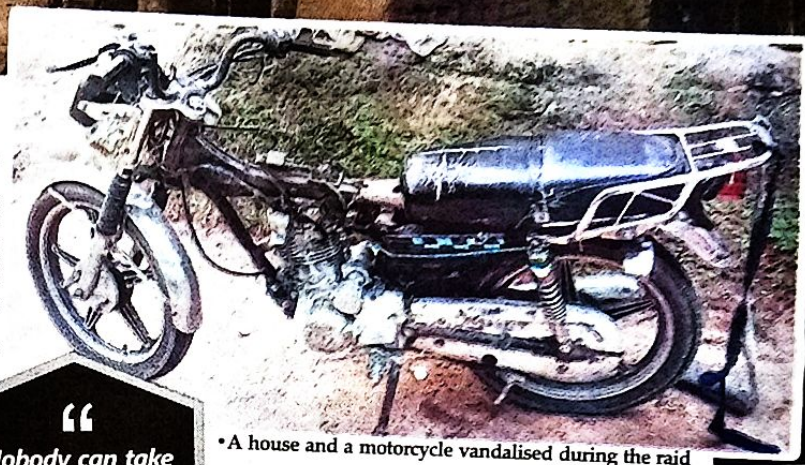
"If they had a case, they should have taken the appropriate channel to address them; not taking innocent lives in cold blood."

"Five persons were gruesomely murdered in cold blood and buried in shallow grave inside the forest over what I described as unfounded allegations."

"It is barbaric, it is unacceptable and we will leave no stone unturned in ensuring they face the full weight of the law," SP Ugho said.

It was gathered that the alleged police attack on the community followed the incident where three police officers, including an Assistant Superintendent of Police (ASP) serving under Odukpani Divisional Police Station, Cross River State Command, were rescued from their abductors.

The Operation to rescue the three law enforcement agents was carried out by SP Awodi Abdulhameed's Anti-Cultism and Kidnapping Squad (ACKS), following directives from the Commissioner of Police. The squad



•A house and a motorcycle vandalised during the raid

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recovered a service pistol during the rescue operation, it was gathered.

The incident which occurred at Ndon Owong, Odukpani Local Government Area on October 13, 2022, followed the hacking to death of five women out of the 15 marked for killing by village youths over allegations that they were witches.

A security source who pleaded anonymity, told The Nation that this was not the first time irate youths would hold policemen hostage in the same community.

The source added that after the killing of the five women, 10 others were let off the

hook while the five killed were buried in a shallow grave in the "evil forest."

"It was on the strength of this information that the police swung into action and invited the village head."

"Our men from the division where the incident occurred went to deliver an invitation letter that the youths of the community held the three officers hostage."

"They formed a mob and disarmed an ASP with a service pistol. They started beating and cutting the trio with machetes, inflicting various degrees of injuries on them."

"It took the intervention of the Anti-Cultism and Kidnapping Squad to rescue the officers and also recovered the service pistol and arrested two suspects."

Among those arrested are Etim Effiong (34), and Micheal Etim Udoh (32)

"They have made useful statements and we have already launched a manhunt for other fleeing suspects involved in the killing of the five women as well as those that held the three police officers hostage," the source revealed."