

5 killed, others missing as Akwa Ibom, Abia boundary war escalates

Iniobong Ekponta | Uyo

NO fewer than five persons have been reportedly killed and four others declared missing in a renewed clash between the Usaka Uko community in Ikwuano Local Government Area of Abia State and its neighbour, Nkari community in Ini Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State.

The lingering communal war, it was gathered, began again in the early hours of Friday, January 22, when some youths suspected to come from Usaka Uko allegedly ambushed indigenes of Nkari, shot at them and made away with some valuables, including motorcycles.

Recall that similar incident occurred in August 2020, when about 11 people were allegedly killed and scores injured in both camps.

One of the elders in Nkari, Major Tony Isenyeng, a retired military officer, told members of the Civil Liberties Organization (CLO), led by its chairman, Franklyn Isong, who visited the deserted

community on a fact-finding mission, that "the community has become helpless due to the continuous bloodletting occasioned by the crisis."

He called on the National Boundary Commission (NBC) to hasten up in giving a clear demarcation of the boundary, adding that security should be permanently mounted around the troubled areas to forestall further skirmishes.

Narrating the incident, a former councillor in Nkari Ward 4, Honourable Benjamin Christopher Akpan, said "last Friday, which was our market day, the attackers laid ambush and killed our people. They killed my younger brother. My relative and her husband's corpses were also found this morning. I am sure they both went to the early market."

"Four persons who were said to have passed through the road could not be found as I speak to you now. May be they have been abducted because we have not seen them. The issue is beyond our control. How can we be living in perpetual fear in our father's land? We have be-

come endangered species."

Also, the member representing Ini state constituency, Honourable Emmanuel Bassey, who is also the Chief Whip, described the crisis as a guerilla warfare in that the attackers laid ambush and shot at anyone who crossed the road.

He called for security presence in the area, even as he called on the Federal Government to mandate the NBC to do the demarcation of the boundary with utmost urgency.

Speaking on the matter during Tuesday's plenary at the House of Assembly, Bassey said "in my first and second term at the state House of Assembly, I had moved a motion of urgent public importance on the need to rescue the people of Nkari. I told the floor in October last year that if the crisis is not addressed, it would worsen and deteriorate to the extent that we won't be able to manage it."

"One of my prayers was that the NBC should come and finish the work it started about seven years ago. What that place needs is a com-

plete demarcation. We wrote to the boundary commission and the office of the deputy governor, which culminated in a meeting last year in Abia State, where all the relevant stakeholders from both states were present. The boundary commission agreed to return in December to do the demarcation and bring about lasting peace."

"Unfortunately, January is almost ending and they have not come back as promised. To stop the bloodletting, let the federal or both state governments take over the place and build industries that would be of benefit to people from Abia and Akwa Ibom states. In so doing, the problem would automatically be resolved."

On his part, the clan head of the Nkari clan, His Highness, Udoette Edon, called on the state government to construct the Mbiabong/Nkari Road in order to link Nkari people to their kiths and kins in Akwa Ibom State, noting that lack of motorable road contributes to the attacks the Nkari people are facing in the hands of the people of Usaka

Uko.

The traditional ruler called on the state and Federal Government to come to the aid of the people of Nkari by providing them electricity, potable water, primary and secondary schools and healthcare facilities.

He urged the state and Federal Government to take over the disputed farmland and use same for investments that will be beneficial to the people.

Also speaking, leader of Nkari Community, Obong Bassey Inuaeyen, called on the state government to ensure permanent security presence in Nkari community until the NBC resolves the boundary dispute.

He assured the Nkari people that the state governor, Mr Udom Emmanuel, will construct the Nkari road as he promised during his (Inuaeyen's) mother funeral in 2017.

However, the CLO chairman, Isong, had called on Governor Emmanuel to look into the plight of the Nkari people, as the place showed a total disconnect from basic amenities, such as good road,

healthcare centre, school, potable water and electricity.

He also urged the Federal Government to take over the land and site industries so that everybody can have peace.

The state Police Public Relations Officer (PPRO), Odiko Macdon, confirmed the crisis, saying normalcy has returned to the area through the efforts of the police commissioners of both Abia and Akwa Ibom states.

Macdon, however, said he was not aware of the resurgence of killings in the communities, adding that he is yet to be briefed by the Divisional Police Officers (DPOs) in charge of the affected areas, saying "I can confirm crisis in the area, but my men have not reported any death or seen corpses in the area."

"I am speaking from official channel, I can't confirm any death because we did not see any body anywhere, but there was a crisis at Nkari and the situation is calm now by the efforts of the commissioners of police and stakeholders from both states."

Police arrest man who