

Gunmen attack Imo INEC headquarters, police kill three

This is another systematic attack targeted at commission —INEC

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Owerri

GUNMEN in the early hours of Monday attacked the headquarters of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), Owerri, Imo State, setting fire to the Atahuru Jega Building, where the agency's educational and official documents are kept.

The gunmen also set ablaze two Toyota Hilux vans and destroyed the transport department.

Attempts were also made to burn other offices, including the one housing the office of the Resident Electoral Commissioner (REC) in the

state.

Nigeria Tribune gathered that the hoodlums, armed with sophisticated weapons and numbering about 20, stormed the INEC headquarters and unleashed mayhem for several hours.

The attack came few weeks after the agency had distributed some materials to various local government areas across the state.

Briefing newsmen in Owerri on Monday, the state Police Public Relations Officer (PPRO), CSP Michael Abattam, said three gunmen who attacked the headquarters of the electoral commission were killed during the gun duel with police operatives which lasted for an hour.

He said the gunmen also killed a policeman and injured another.

The bodies of the three gunmen were paraded at the police headquarters alongside items recovered from them, which include five rifles, two vehicles, charms, locally-made bombs, phones and money.

Abattam said: "They [gunmen] attacked the INEC headquarters in Owerri, at about 3:00a.m. They threw bombs at the roof of the INEC building but unfortunately for them, they were resisted by our men who were guarding the place. They came in four vehicles and were fully armed."

The police spokesperson said while the gunmen en-

gaged operatives guarding the headquarters, more police personnel were deployed and when they noticed this, they escaped, abandoning one of their vehicles.

He said the hoodlums were then chased towards Onitsha road, adding that others escaped with bullet wounds.

"Unfortunately, one of our men paid the supreme price, while another was injured. We recovered two vehicles. We also recovered five rifles, charms, locally-made explosives, phones, money and other exhibits."

Meanwhile, a statement released in Abuja and signed by the National Commissioner and Chairman, Infor-

mation and Voter Education Committee of INEC, Festus Okoye, disclosed that "the incident occurred at about 3:00a.m. today [Monday], December 12.

"The attack affected the part of the building occupied by the Election and Party Monitoring (EPM) Department and one official utility vehicle (a Toyota Hilux pickup van) was burnt.

"The response of the security and emergency services (the fire service) curtailed further damage to the building and other assets of the commission.

"No critical election materials were destroyed. There were also no casualties involving staff of the commission."

INEC recalled that Monday's incident was "the third attack on the commission's facilities in Imo State in less than two weeks following the earlier attacks on our Orlu LGA office on Thursday, December 1, and Oru West LGA office on Sunday, December 4.

"Our Imo State headquarters is located in the centre of the Owerri, the state capital, between a court and the state secretariat.

"This is, therefore, yet another systematic attack targeted at the commission's assets across the country, more so on the day that the collection of Permanent Voters' Cards (PVCs) commences nationwide ahead of the 2023 general election."