

① 20 feared killed in Cross River communal clash

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ABOUT 20 people are believed to have been killed in renewed boundary clashes between Yache-Ijegu community in Yala Local Government Area of Cross River State and Tiv settlers in the area.

Although the exact number of victims is yet to be ascertained, there are concerns that women and children make up the highest percentage.

Many other people also sustained gunshots and machetes injuries, while several houses were burnt on both sides.

A source in Yache, Augustine Odey, alleged that hostilities resumed on Thursday afternoon after a Yache indigene, Ayeku Godwin Ochuole, went to his farm, but was allegedly attacked and killed by Tiv people.

He said the incident resulted in the abduction of at least nine persons.

The latest boundary clashes started about two months ago when some Tiv people allegedly stopped the payment of royalties for their stay on Yache land.

The Tiv settlers had claimed that they were being extorted by Yache natives and that they have no other place to call their own, having settled there for over 100 years, during the period in which they have inter-married and owned properties.

Tiv leaders, including Mr Jacob Uswa, who claimed he was born 54 years ago and was made a chief on the land

after the death of his father, alleged that Yache boys have continued to attack them from the bushes.

He said: "We can't fold our arms and watch them continue to kill our people. We have to defend ourselves. They usually hide in the bushes to launch attacks. This is also our land. We are also from Cross River State.

"I am surprised to hear from Yache people that we are not from here. We are indigenes of Cross River State, not Benue State, but despite this, we had been paying royalties on lands and houses."

According to him, it was the boys from Yache who came to collect royalties that caused the last crisis in July, and which has continued despite the intervention of the state government and the deployment of military personnel in the area.

Reacting to the latest incident, one of the commanders of the security team in the area, who simply gave his name as Lieutenant Alex, said the team is trying its best to bring about peace between the two warring factions, "but Yache boys constantly indulge in attacks. The Tivs have listened to us by restraining.

"The Yache boys would even move to the other side of Benue State, where soldiers are also keeping watch to attack.

"They have made our peace efforts difficult. We had thought we wouldn't be here for more than two weeks, but it's going to months now. They should know that war is not good at all.