

8/20/06

# Etiebet dumps ANPP

Story on page 2

THE MOST WIDELY READ NEWSPAPER



# PUNCH

TUESDAY, JUNE 20, 2006 VOL. 17 NO. 19, 630 N80.00 Website: [www.punchng.com](http://www.punchng.com)

# Rioters burn Onitssha prison, free 204 inmates

**John Ameh, Onitssha**

**HOODLUMS** on Monday set Onitssha Prison ablaze and freed over 204 inmates.

It was learnt that the hoodlums arrived at the prison, located on the bank of the River Niger, around 5am and overpowered the guards before setting it on fire. Although the 204 inmates were reportedly or-

they were said to have later returned to the yard.

The Agence France Presse, quoted one of the returnees, Bright Chukwujekwu, as having told journalists that the attackers were armed with guns, machetes, hammers, iron rods and acid.

He claimed that a number of prison officials on duty were injured by the mob who presented themselves as members of the

sation of the Sovereign State of Biafra.

But MASSOB's spokesman, Mr. David Chinedu, denied his group's involvement in the attack.

A few hours after the incident, Governor Peter Obi directed security operative to shoot on site, any

hoodlum hiding under the cover of the National Association of Road Transport Owners and MASSOB to cause violence in Onitssha.

Obi gave the directive a few minutes after an emergency meeting with security chiefs in the state.

Those who attended the

meeting included representatives of the Army, the Police, the State Security Service as well as those referred to as "Anambra stakeholders."

The Deputy Inspector-General of Police, Operations, Force Headquarters, Abuja, Mr. Mike Okoro, who

arrived in the state on Monday to take over police operations also attended the meeting.

Obi, who looked sad as the meeting rose, told journalists that MASSOB, NARTO and the Anambra Vigilance Service must *Continued on page 7*

at N1.10 per share

Payable in full on Application

Time: 12:00

## Rioters burn Onitsha prison *Continued from page 1*

leave the state.

He said, "We have told the police what to do since it is their duty to enforce law and order. All we want is that, every group should leave Onitsha. By that, I mean MASSOB, NARTO, AVS; whoever.

"The police know what to do. As the Chief Security Officer of this state, I am saying we do not want these people again.

"If any of them does not leave, shoot on site; they must leave. They are our problems.

"We know these things. Some people are behind NARTO and MASSOB. They represent nothing good for the people of Anambra State."

He described the attack on the prison as regrettable.

The first attack on the Prison was on February 23, during the reprisal in the city over cartoon on Prophet Mohammed.

Okoro also told journalists after the expanded security meeting that the Federal Government was worried about the violence in Onitsha.

He explained that the Inspector-General of Police, Mr. Sunday Ehindero, instructed him to oversee the security operations in the city because of the crisis.

The DIG said, "My stay here is indefinite. Onitsha is of commercial importance to Nigeria, so we shall do everything possible to restore peace there.

"I am here to join the AIG 'Zone 9' (Mr. Ade Ajakaiye). I will go round and assess the damage and

after that, we shall draw up the strategies to ensure that this thing does not happen again", Okoro said.

He denied allegations that the police were backing NARTO, in spite of the fact that it had been outlawed in the state.

According to him, a body which has been outlawed remains so until otherwise stated.

But the DIG parried a question on why his men had been unable to arrest any NARTO member in the state.

"There are no badges on the faces of people arrested to say this one is NARTO or the other group," Okoro said.

He confirmed that the police lost one Armoured Personnel Carrier, two stations and vehicles. But he denied that any policeman was killed by the hoodlums.

Our correspondent reported that most parts of Onitsha remained calm on Monday afternoon, with residents and traders going about their normal businesses.

A bus driver, Mr. Uchenna Okonkwo, said that he drove up to Upper Iwaka, the theatre of the current fighting, and was surprised that major roads had been opened to traffic.

A team of soldiers and riot policemen patrolled the Onitsha flyover, which links the Onitsha-Owerri Expressway.

The dual carriage way had been blocked by hoodlums for the better part of last week.

They reportedly extorted as much as N500 from des-

perate travellers before allowing them to proceed on their journey.

Meanwhile, the leader of the Restoration Group, Prof. Pat Utomi, has urged the Federal Government to urgently resolve the Onitsha crisis.

Utomi, in a statement on Monday in Lagos, said the crisis would have a long-term effect on the commercial life of the city if allowed to degenerate.

Utomi, who said he had been speaking with some of the stakeholders, including Obi, noted that it was important for the Federal Government to thoroughly investigate the cause of the crisis.

He called on the gladiators in state to be careful not to sacrifice the future of their children on the altar of immediate material and power gratification.

Utomi also called on leading statesmen from the state to speak boldly on the issue so that innocent and poor Nigerians do not continue to suffer hardship as a result of the callousness of power mongers.

He noted that the fracas in Onitsha again showed the importance of a decentralised policing system and regretted the limits the governor of a state had to act to ensure law and order.

Such incidents, he said, had shown that law and order should be a top priority in the 2007 campaign.

The RG leader enjoined all Nigerians to recognise that peace and economic freedom are directly related.