

Monarch arrested, 5 killed, houses torched in communal clash

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THE death toll in Osile Village, Ogbunike, in the Ovi Local Government Area of Anambra State, reportedly rose to five on Saturday, following the killing of four more persons.

The development resulted from the escalation of an age-long land dispute in the area, which reopened last week.

At the centre of the dispute were said to be the traditional ruler of Ogbunike, Igwe John Umenyiora, and the leaders of Osile village.

One person had earlier been killed last week after rampaging youths torched several buildings and reportedly injured at least eight persons.

Investigations by *Sunday Punch* on Saturday showed that about six members of a joint police and military team sent to quell the clashes were

wounded.

Osile villagers were said to be demanding a return of over 100 acres of land the monarch was alleged to have taken control of in the last two decades.

Three leaders of the affected community, Mr. Ikwuka Ibemesi, Mr. Uche Okoye and Mr. E.C. Okakpu, had alleged that in an agreement reached between the Osile people and the monarch in 1977, only 30 acres of land was leased to him (Umenyiora).

He was allegedly asked to develop the portion given to him within five years on the payment of an annual fee of N500, according to a petition they sent to the Anambra State Government and security agencies.

Although *Sunday Punch* gathered that the monarch was to be in control of the 30 acres for 99 years, according to the said agreement, trou-

ble started when he allegedly began to add more portions without the approval of the villagers.

The state Police Command reacted to the latest killings on Saturday by arresting and detaining the monarch.

Investigations by *Sunday Punch* also revealed that many villagers had fled the community after talks brokered by the Vice-Chancellor of the Nnamdi Azikwe University, Awka, Prof. Ilochi Okafor, a stakeholder in the area, between the group supporting the monarch and town union leaders, failed.

UNIZIK and the Osile community jointly own a company, NAUOSIL Properties Investment Limited, in the affected area.

The Commissioner in charge of the state police command, Mr. Haruna John, confirmed the killings to *Sun-*

day Punch on Saturday, but added that normalcy was returning to the village.

"We have beefed-up security in that community; more men have been dispatched there to safeguard lives and property," he said.

"Many of those who fled the place have also started returning home; we have assured them that nothing will happen to them.

"The police again suffered casualties as a result of this ugly incident; the youths were shooting and there was a gun-battle lasting up to three hours.

"A thorough investigation into the matter is in progress," he said.

A Government House source told *Sunday Punch* that Governor Peter Obi had received a report on the crisis.

The villagers were said to have appealed to Obi to impose a curfew on the community.