

Police on the rampage over

Stories and Photos by
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FOR the people of Eyeti Ekiebong Enwang in the Mbo Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State, it is anguish unlimited as they continue to count their losses from a recent attack by policemen numbering over a 100. A look at the community from a distance sends a message of a people that are in trouble as thick dark smoke finds its way into the sky, following the razing of buildings and other property by angry policemen in the wee hours of Sunday, September 16, 2007.

About five people from the community have died, while several others have been reported missing. Trouble started on Saturday, September 15, 2007, when both regular and mobile policemen mounted a roadblock along Ewang in the Mbo LGA.

The police allegedly extorted about N8,000 from commercial vehicle drivers and motorcycle riders and hid the sum inside a nearby bush. It was, however, gathered that the security agents were shocked when after the day's work, they decided to pick their "loot" from where it was hidden and found out it had disappeared. They were said to have alleged that one of the okada riders from the community took the money.

According to eyewitnesses, the policemen began to levy all okada riders that came their way the sum of N500, a demand, which the motorcyclists resisted and also sought for explanation on why the policemen would not want to take the usual N20, but N500.

Dissatisfied with the position of the motorcyclists, the policemen, it was gathered, became aggressive and this made most of the motorcyclists to call off the day's job as early as 5pm. The belief was that if the angry policemen did not see them, there would be no cause for war.

But such calculation later appeared to be

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• One of the buildings that was destroyed. Inset: Vandalised property



wrong as the policemen, who were about 100 raided the community about 1am and unleashed mayhem on the people of the area, whose youths were mainly commercial motorcycle riders. Majority of the people ran into the bush after hearing the sound of sporadic gunshots from the intruders.

While several members of the community got injured in the melee, some had their property destroyed by the policemen. If the breaking of window glasses, doors, beer and soft drink bottles by the policemen were seen as bearable by the villagers, the bombing of a whole building with explosives, which took the life of one Miss Mummy Okon Etim, will ever remain unforgettable to the members of the community.

When *Sunday Punch* arrived in Ekiebong Ewang on Wednesday, the people were crestfallen and were still mourning the death of Etim, a young lady of about 25 years in the house of his uncle. One of the residents of the community, who identified herself as Mrs. Iquo Asuquo, disclosed that one of the mobile policemen threw in an explosive into the building and the bang set the house on fire. Asuquo explained that the owner of the building had run into a nearby bush in his bid to escape the wrath of the security men.

Asuquo said, "The bomb they threw into the building killed our daughter, Mummy Okon Etim. She was about 25 years old. It is very difficult to understand why the policemen decided to visit us with such horrible experience. The incident that led to their missing money has nothing to do with us. We are peaceful people and do not deserve to be treated this way."

Along the narrow road of Ekiebong community were several motorcycles that were set on fire by the policemen. The youths in the area were seen idling away in their different homes as those who were supposed to protect them had destroyed their means of livelihood. Apart from the motorcycles that were set ablaze, the irate policemen also torched some electronic gadgets like televisions, radios, generators and deep freezers.

A woman, who identified herself as Mrs. Grace Etim, did not escape the anger of the security agents, as she received machete cuts on her back. Narrating her ordeal, Etim explained that some of the policemen gained entry into her building through the backdoor

where she was injured. Corroborating his wife's statement, Mr. Okon Etim explained that he lost a cash sum of N20,000, while his motorcycle was destroyed by the policemen.

The security agents were said to have raided the house of the clan head of Ekiebong Ewang, His Royal Highness, Bassey Etifit, the Iniquo of Enwang and arrested him. The royal father was whisked away with only a wrapper tied around his waist.

Narrating how the traditional ruler suffered in the hands of the policemen, the son, Mr. Christian Etifit, explained that they ransacked his father's palace, beat him up before taking him away. He stated that his father showed

Assembly sets up probe panel

THE Akwa Ibom State House of Assembly has set up a five-man committee to look into the crisis in Mbo Local Government Area.

The member representing the area had informed the House of the crisis in the local government area.

The Speaker of the House, Mr. Ignatius Edet told members that part of the committee's responsibility is to look into the security implications of the police action and inaction in Mbo and also come out with solutions for peace to return to the area.

The Speaker expressed worry over the development, saying it was regrettable that the police, whose duty it was to maintain law and order in the society were involved in the crisis.

The committee members include Obong Okon Uwah representing Ukanafun State Constituency, Mr. Jack Udota (Eket), Mr. Iboru Udom (Oruk Anam), Mr. Jerome Nsangedighi (Oron/Nung Uko) and Mr. Asuquo Odung (Okobo).

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the men the photograph of his uncle, who is a top ranking naval officer and pleaded with them to consider his good offices as a military man. All this fell on deaf ears as they went ahead to turn the palace upside down.

He said, "They set a house ablaze and one young lady died there. Three babies also died in another building that was set ablaze by the police. So I don't know where my father is now. I don't even know what they have done to him. My sister, who lives not quite far from here, has run into the bush with her three children after the policemen attacked them in their house. I don't know where they are now"

He called on the federal and state government to come to their rescue and save them from the havoc that was unleashed by the police in Ekiebong Ewang.

When contacted, the State Police Public Relations Officer, Mr. Gab Ngban told *Sunday Punch* that the matter was still under investigation. Ngban maintained that two policemen were still missing after the incident.

He declined further comments on the matter, saying since the issue was a sensitive one, he would not speak much on it until investigation was concluded. Ngban, however, called on members of the public to inform the police if they had any clue of the whereabouts of the police officers.

A'Ibom govt wades into crisis

THE Akwa Ibom State Government has waded into the crisis that erupted in Enwang, Mbo Local Government Area, when police attacked the people of the community.

The State Governor, Obong Godswill Akpabio, said on Saturday that the government had taken adequate measures to ensure that peace returned to the community affected during the crisis.

Akpabio, who spoke through his Chief Press Secretary, Mr. Usoro Usoro, told *Sunday Punch* in a telephone interview that an ad hoc committee had already been set up to investigate the crisis in the area.

He explained that information at his disposal was that the youths in Enwang attacked the police division in Mbo in protest of their seized motorcycles.

According to him, the police had accosted five okada riders suspected to be criminals and impounded their motorcycles. It was in a bid to retrieve their machine that the fracas started.

He added that the police in retaliation stormed Ekiebong Enwang and also attacked the people of the community.

But the member representing Mbo State Constituency in the House of Assembly, Mrs Alice Ekpenyong debunked the allegation, saying that there was no time the youths or the commercial motorcyclists in the area attacked and burnt down the police division in the area.

Ekpenyong stressed that the police division was far away from the community, pointing out that none of the youths from the area ventured into the police division for such purpose.

"The police division is intact and the crisis in Enwang has nothing to do with the burning of any police station", she stated.

She pleaded with the state Police Commissioner, Mr. Moses Anegbode to effect the release of the youths arrested and detained at the state command.



•A destroyed beer parlour. Inset: The burnt lady, Okon Etim

Community threatens court action

COMMUNITY leaders in Mbo Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State have vowed to take the police to court if they fail to release their members, who were arrested and detained when security agents stormed Enwang in the early hours of last Sunday to unleash mayhem.

The leaders expressed sadness over the continued detention of 34 members of the community for over seven days.

Speaking with *Sunday Punch* on Saturday, a leader in the community, Chief Innocent Itah, warned that should the police refuse to release the members of the community, the only option left would be to sue the force to court.

Itah noted that it was wrong for the police to have arrested and detained the members of the community beyond 48 hours.

Itah, who is also a former aide to the immediate past governor of the state, Obong Victor Attah, said that the whole community had observed that 34 persons, including the

clan head of Enwang, Bassey Effiong Etifit were missing after the raid by the police.

Narrating how the whole incident happened, Itah explained that some policemen allegedly seized motorcycles belonging to some youths in the area. He said trouble started when the youths called the Divisional Police Officer, demanding for their motorcycles.

"Two policemen were accosted by the boys, who asked them to call the DPO in Mbo. But when the DPO was informed, all he (the DPO) did was to send armed men to these boys and when they came, they started shooting randomly. Two of the boys were killed and the other people scammed for safety," he said.

"The police later turned around to say that they have kidnapped two of their men. It was a muddled up story from the police. This happened on Friday. From what was gathered, policemen by their number were ordered to come to Enwang and teach the community a good lesson."

Traditional ruler was arrested half-naked - Son

The son of the traditional ruler of Enwang, Christian Etifit, speaks to CHUKWUDI AKASIKE on the crisis

What really happened (cuts in)...

Come. Let me show you one example before I try to make any statement. (He took me to his father's palace. The whole room was scattered.) So this is my father's palace. His name is Chief Iniquo I, the clan head of Afahokpo Enwang.

Is Iniquo the title or...? (cuts in).

His name is Bassey Etifit, the Iniquo I. What happened is that we heard information. Something happened on the road passing to Ibaka, between the policemen and the cyclists.

This town is called Ekiebong Enwang. We were here. We didn't know what was going on. But later, we heard information that the policemen were having a serious problem with the cyclists.

Then we slept, but later, around two o'clock in the night, there was a very big storm in this town. They destroyed houses, they burnt houses. They destroyed people's property. When they get into your house, they will pack all your property outside, burn them; anything inside, they burnt. So, I was here; I heard a very serious bang on the door.

This door (pointing at the entrance to this father's palace) was open. So myself, I stayed a little bit. I stood somewhere around. So they



•Etifit

asked my father, 'where is your son?' My father just took them (the policemen) and showed them Captain Etifit in the Navy.

When he showed them the Captain Etifit's (photograph), one of them molested the man. They did whatever they liked with the man. Till now, we don't know his whereabouts. But in this town now, we have information. When they took the man out, the man didn't wear anything. They forced the man out of the house.

You mean your father wore only a wrapper?

Yes, he was tying a wrapper. They took him out. We are missing four people. We don't

It's not true -Police

THE reaction of the Police Force Public Relation Officer, Haz Iwendi on Saturday:

SOME policemen who were on patrol, saw a series of motor cycles, carrying three people on a bike and were moving toward Ibaka, and where they have the naval base. And that day was the day a naval base was attacked. The police thought they were going for another attack. So, they stopped them. As they stopped them, some ran away and others were arrested and taken to the station. When they took them to the station, others went and regrouped, and started attacking policemen; they kidnapped three policemen and two policemen are still missing up till now.

"They took the third one to a bus and tied him. The police now moved in there to look for their men, who were kidnapped. One of the villagers was kind enough to take the policemen to where the man was tied in the bus. The crowd grew angry with the man who went to show the police way and burnt his house. It was the villagers that burnt the man's house for showing the police where they tied the man. I can tell you that there was no single death; no single person died. No single house was burnt, apart from the man's house. I called the Commissioner of Police, and he called your reporter, who has been very unfriendly with them and he asked your reporter that was he there and he said he didn't go there he just wrote from where he was. Because the House of Assembly sent a delegation there and when they went there, they apologised to the police that what they heard was not true. They heard that houses were burnt and people died, and saw that what they said was not true. And they apologised to the police and the commissioner."

mean those they took out. Four people, we don't know where they are: whether they have killed them or not we don't know, because we can't see them.

I saw a dead person there...

Yes! They burnt that house and they burnt that woman inside. Another house was also burnt, and they burnt three babies inside the house. So please, I am giving you the information, I don't know where my father is. I don't know what they are doing with my daddy. And there is a lot of destruction. They are uncountable and it happened here in this territory.

The information I have now also is that they (the policemen) got to one of my sisters' house. Her name is Census. They swept everything in the house and brought them outside and burnt them to ashes. Now, I don't know where my sister and the children are.

What is her name again?

The name of that my sister is Census. I don't know where my sister and the children are. Till now, they are unseen. That is what is going on. I want the government to come to our rescue by looking at the disaster that the police have done in this territory.

The event (incident) between the police and motorcyclists that happened is not close to our territory. It is very far away; not close to our territory. The event took place at Ibaka, on the major road. I am surprised that they came to this territory to come and cause destruction and casualties.