

Two die in Rivers oil royalty clash

Ibanga Isine, Port Harcourt

FIGHTING over communal oil royalty on Wednesday claimed two lives, while many other persons were injured in Odagwa, Etche Local Government Area of Rivers State.

Our correspondent learnt that fighting started when youths from the community went on the rampage over the alleged diversion of communal funds by some influential persons in the area.

The crisis, which began that started in August, according to a community source, had forced many residents to seek refuge in neighbouring communities.

Although the source did not disclose what led to the escalation of the crisis, he noted that the angry youths stormed a family house and opened fire inside the compound.

During the invasion, he said two brothers, Ejike Ejiogu and Bob Ejiogu, were shot dead. The suspected killers then went round the community, burning houses of persons perceived to have been involved in the alleged embezzlement.

In the process, five houses were reduced to ashes while some of their occupants sustained various degrees of injury.

Some of the injured were seen being rushed to Port Harcourt for medical attention while other residents fled with some of their personal belongings.

The youths, however, retreated when a contingent of riot police officers arrived in the area later in the day.

The leader of the Niger Delta Coalition Against Violence, Mr. Lekia Christian, told our correspondent that the crisis was unnecessary.

While condemning the killing of the brothers and destruction of property, Christian said the incident was unfortunate and called on members of the community to embrace peace.

He also appealed to law enforcement agents to arrest and prosecute those found to have been involved in the crisis.

When contacted, the Police Public Relations Officer in the state's command, Mrs. Rita Inoma-Abbey, confirmed the incident.

She said two persons were killed while over 20 others sustained injuries, adding that policemen had been drafted to the community to stop further acts of lawlessness.

She did not, however, say whether the police had made any arrest.