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Thursday, 7 January 2010
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Communal clash claims one, properties in Enugu

By Adelani Adepegba, Enugu, Published: Monday, 4 Jan 2010

A A A A A

A violent communal clash between Umuoka and Affa communities in Udi Local Government Area of Enugu State has claimed one life and several houses.

The two communities had been engaged in a prolonged boundary dispute but the matter degenerated when groups from the warring communities engaged in a skirmish on Friday.

Investigations showed that the immediate cause of the violence was the establishment of an asphalt plant in the disputed land by an indigenous engineering firm, Comag Nigeria Limited, linked to one Cosmas Agu.

The company had allegedly used a development area administrator in collaboration with Umuoka community to gain entrance to the disputed land, indisregard of claims by Affa community to the place.

It was gathered that the said administrator removed a signpost on the disputed land with the inscription, "Welcome to Affa."

The action reportedly angered Affa youths who immediately mobilised to the disputed land and chased away people at the site of asphalt plant.

Our correspondent learnt that the aggrieved youths were about setting the plant on fire when a detachment of armed mobile policemen moved in on the orders of the Commissioner of Police, Enugu State Command, Mr. Mohammed Zarewa, and stopped them. The policemen reportedly dispersed the mob and cordoned off the entire asphalt plant.

But the intervention of the police could not stop reprisal attacks on Affa community by youths from Umuoka, who saw the attempt to burn down the asphalt plant as an affront on them.

The confrontation led to the death of a youth from Affa community. The name of the victim could not be immediately ascertained but it was learnt that his killers dropped a note beside his corpse on a piece of cardboard paper, warning Affa people to stay away from the disputed land or risk more casualties.

His remains have since been deposited in a morgue at Ninth Mile Corner, near Enugu.

At press time on Sunday, several houses had reportedly been razed on both sides, heightening tension in the entire area and even neighbouring communities.

The Police Public Relations Officer in Enugu, Ebere Amaraizu, confirmed the communal clash, but said the police were yet to get information on loss of life in the incident.

"I am aware of what happened in Umuoka. Some people came and told us that somebody was killed. We asked them to take us to the place where the corpse was deposited but they declined," the police spokesperson stated.

Also speaking, the outgoing Chairman of Udi Local Government, Mr. Walter Oji, regretted the incident, noting that he did everything possible to resolve the land dispute before the outbreak of violence between the two communities.

"As I speak with you, I am awaiting the report on the matter from the secretary of the local government. We have been trying to resolve this matter but I learnt that the cause of the violence was the building of an asphalt plant on the disputed land. I have summoned the leaders of the two communities and heard from them and directed my deputy who is the chairman of the boundary committee in the council to look into the matter," he said

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