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Explosions, gunfire rock Rivers APC rally

FEBRUARY 18, 2015 BY CHUKWUDI AKASIKE ■ 99 COMMENTS

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APC governorship candidate, Dakuku Peterside

Thousands of All Progressives Congress supporters scamped to safety on Tuesday when explosions and gunshots boomed at the Okrika National Secondary School Field in Rivers State.

APC governorship candidate, Dakuku Peterside, who was to address the crowd as part of his electioneering, had to be whisked away from the scene by security operatives and his body guards.

About 50 of the APC supporters, four policemen and a Channels Tv correspondent, Charles Eruka, were injured in the attack believed to have been unleashed by unknown political thugs.

Another policeman was however not as lucky as he was shot and killed. His body was deposited at the Braithwaite Memorial Hospital in Port Harcourt.

Eruka, who was stabbed was rushed to a nearby hospital where he was as of 7pm receiving treatment.

The thugs, according to eyewitnesses, first set off three Improvised Explosive Devices within the campaign arena, thereby causing a stampede at field.

One of them said, "They were determined to ensure that we did not hold the rally. When the explosions happened, Dr. Peterside had not arrived. But when he came, they started firing gunshots for about 45 minutes. Many of us had to lie flat on the ground to avoid being hit by bullets.

"But the security agents at the field and some private body guards were able to whisk away our candidate (Peterside) to a safe place."

Peterside, who later emerged from his hideout, said his supporters would not be intimidated by the incident.

He said, "We were not expecting that there would have been a series of explosions as we heard this (Tuesday) morning. But we were very determined and it shows the Okrika spirit of resilience.

"We were very determined to hold the rally in honour of the Okrika spirit of resilience. We were determined to hold the rally in honour of the determination of Okrika people to choose a government that will fight insecurity; rescue people from poverty and create jobs for the youths."

He later spoke with journalists in Port Harcourt where he described Tuesday as one of his saddest days as a politician.

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He claimed that some people had seen a lawmaker in the state leading a group of 50 youths and directing the shooting in Okrika.

The APC candidate said, "Several eyewitnesses saw a member of the Rivers State House of Assembly, accompanied by men in police uniform and several other non-uniformed armed men numbering in excess of 50 around the venue. He was seen personally directing the shooting.

"Today is one of my saddest days as a politician. The day had started on a pleasant note when as part of my campaign rally in Okrika, I visited the Okrika Grammar School, my Alma Mater, where I met with the principal and interacted with the students.

"From there, I proceeded to pay a courtesy call on the Amanyabo of Ogoloma. While I was at the palace, reports reached me and my team that three explosives had been detonated at the venue of the rally, National School Field, Okrika.

"Two of the explosives ripped off parts of the roof of the school building. The APC members and leadership at the venue immediately called in the security personnel and the anti-bomb squad who combed the area. It is important to note that several other explosives were found by the team but all normalcy was restored.

"We proceeded from the Amanyabo to see the Bishop of Okrika Diocese, Anglican Communion Rt. Rev. T. Abere, who prayed with the team at about 1:30 pm. From the Bishop's Court, we headed for the venue and the rally began in earnest with prayers and praise and worship.

"A few persons gave solidarity speeches and while one of our leaders in Okrika LGA, D.D. Alabere, was speaking, we started hearing sporadic gunshots from the back of National School and from the Okrika cemetery.

"Five police officers were shot but one of them is dead. The four injured policemen are in critical conditions in the hospital. One policeman is yet to be accounted for.

"Some other APC supporters are still missing while equipment at the venue was set ablaze. Several cars, including three belonging to the police, were destroyed.

The governorship candidate, who also visited the injured at the BMH, commended the Police for their efforts in spite of being outnumbered by the hoodlums.

Peterside later called off his proposed rally in Ogu/Bolo Local Government Area billed for today (Wednesday) due to the incident in Okrika, a community a few kilometres from Oba-Ama, the hometown of the wife of President Goodluck Jonathan, Patience.

Governor . Rotimi Amaechi accused Patience Jonathan of having a hand in Okrika attack.

"As usual, the wife of the President won't allow the APC hold rally in that place (Okrika). The wife of the President and the governorship candidate of Peoples Democratic Party in Rivers again organised thugs to disrupt APC rally," told journalists after an enlarged APC leaders meeting in Abuja.

Unlike Peterside, the governor accused the police of failing to protect APC followers in the state.

He said, "As usual, the police couldn't protect us. I asked the commissioner of police and he said they had over 200 policemen there. Yet, three explosions and then they opened fire on members of the APC.

"We had meetings with DSS (Directorate of State Security) and police and they confirmed we could go ahead. There were 200 policemen and there were over 20 to 30 DSS men who came there and they did nothing."

After Amaechi and Peterside spoke, a member of his campaign group, told our correspondent that an APC supporter was also killed by the hoodlums.

The state Police Command Public Relations Officer, Ahmad Mohammad, confirmed that a policeman lost his life. He however said that three other policemen sustained gunshot injuries.

Mohammad added, "The Rivers State Police Command wishes to confirm that on 17/02/2015, a governorship rally by the APC was disrupted with sporadic shootings from a far distance to the arena by unknown and unpatriotic elements."

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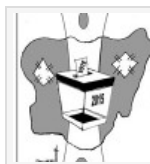


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