

Four killed as soldiers, cultists clash in Rivers

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Four persons, three of whom are suspected members of cult groups, were killed by soldiers on Tuesday in Oboburu community in the Ogba/Egbema/Ndoni Local Government Area of Rivers State.

The cult members were said to have engaged the soldiers in a shootout that lasted for several hours, while some indigenes of the community were said to have started fleeing their homes in droves to avoid being caught in the crossfire.

The cult members who were said to have camped in Oboburu, the second largest community in Egiland, harassed and intimidated the people.

It was gathered that the soldiers were deployed in the area after reports of cult activities in the community got to the 2 Brigade of the Nigerian Army in Port Harcourt.

A source, who is one of the women leaders in Oboburu, said while three of those hit by the soldiers' bullets were alleged cultists, the fourth person was said to have been hit by stray bullet.

The source, however, added that one person, who was seriously injured during the shootout, had been rushed to the hospital.

"The bad boys most times wore military camouflage and have been terrorising the people in the community. I think the soldiers heard about the situation in Oboburu and decided to come here.

"They came in on Tuesday and the shooting was so much that even the innocent ones left Oboburu and ran for safety to nearby villages. Before the soldiers came, there was a notorious armed group that camped in the place.

"Even the VIPs (very important personalities) from this community have all left because of the bad boys. The ordinary people began to pack their things and left during the shootout on Tuesday," the source, a woman, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said.

Explaining that she had also run into hiding, the source added that the soldiers were still in the community, ostensibly to rid the community of hoodlums.

The Assistant Army Public Relations Officer of 2 Brigade, Port Harcourt, Captain Eli Lazarus, confirmed that the operation by the soldiers was still ongoing in the community.

Lazarus explained that the operation was aimed at flushing out the "bad boys" in the community and ensured that peace returned to the place.

“It is a normal operation and our soldiers are there to smoke out the bad boys that have been disturbing the peace in the place. I can confirm to you that the operation is ongoing,” he said.

The Brigade’s spokesman stated that he could not confirm the number of casualties in the ongoing operation.

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