

Gunmen sack Imo community, kill nine

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Imo State Police Commissioner, Mr. Taiwo Lakanu

Samson Folarin

No fewer than nine people have been reportedly killed after suspected cult members attacked Assa community in the Ohaji-Egbema Local Government Area of Imo State.

PUNCH Metro learnt that the victims were killed in a week-long attack which started last Monday.

Residents, who spoke with our correspondent, said they had deserted the community over fear of being killed by the cult members who were said to be fighting over oil deposit in the area.

One of the slain victims was identified as 32-year-old Vitalis Walata.

Walata's relative, Kingsley Igwe, said the father of two was killed on Monday during a visit to the community.

He said, "The incident happened on Monday morning while he was on a visit. Those men attacked him at the market square and shot him dead. He was married with two children and his wife was pregnant."

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Shares

er he was killed on Monday, those gunmen shot two people dead on Tuesday. On Wednesday, ther man in the community was killed. On Thursday, a taxi driver was waylaid and shot dead. A
60 l of nine people were killed last week.

I speak to you, there is no school, market or church in the community that is functioning. rybody has deserted the place. I have also run away.”

Government Liaison Officer of the council, Oluchi Odita, confirmed the attacks, but said he ld not tell the number of victims.

ta appealed for the intervention of the state and federal governments, saying the situation had out of control.

s the youths who are killing one another. We have been trying to mediate without any success. riep us use your medium to beg the government to come to our rescue. People are running away from the commnity,” he added.

An indigene of the council, Emeka Ononomadu, said the situation was caused by the imposition of traditional rulers on the community by the government.

He said, “That place has been reduced to a war zone by cult members due to the deposit of oil in the community. And the problem started when the state government decided to encroach into the traditional selection process. Some groups, who did not want to be ruled by leaders imposed by the government, kicked and started fomenting trouble. This developed into a full-blown war among communities, led by cult groups.”

The Commissioner of Police, Imo State, Taiwo Lakanu, said the command was working with the military to end the crisis in the community.

Lakanu, who spoke with our correspondent on the telephone, said the police were faced with the challenge of a difficult terrain and the reluctance of residents to give information.

He said, “We heard that some people were killed, but the situation is not as terrible as that. Two cults are involved in the crisis in that community and the problem has been on for about three

years. After killing each other, they would retreat into the creeks. The terrain is difficult and because the families of the victims don't also cooperate with the police in the area of information, it becomes difficult to make arrests.

"We have, however, met with the military and the representatives of the government to improve security in the community. We have also deployed two units of riot policemen in the area and soldiers are making efforts to send in troops as well. We are trying to recruit those who will give information that will aid our investigations."

The Imo State Governor's Chief Press Secretary, Sam Onwuemeodo, promised to call back after making enquiries on the incident.

"I don't have that information, so I can't speak on it. But there has been a crisis in that area over oil. I don't know whether this oil is a blessing or a curse. Some of the attacks are senseless. Sometimes, those youths would allege that their community leaders collected money from the oil companies and they would attack them. I don't know whether to tell God to dry up the supply of oil in the community," he added.

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