

Nursing mother, baby, boy drown as Lagos officials chase residents

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•Demolition of Idasho community Photo: Samson Folarin

Samson Folarin

A nursing mother, Maoteen Yisa; her baby, Atamah Braimah; and a 10-year-old boy, Paulsu Akiyah, have reportedly drowned while fleeing from Lagos officials in Ilubirin-Oju Olokun, a riverine community on Lagos Island, Lagos State.

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PUNCH Metro gathered that officials of the Lagos State Environmental Sanitation and Special Offences (Enforcement) Unit had invaded the community on Thursday.

The officials were alleged to have destroyed the residents' makeshift structures, as they chased them away from the area.

The victims, who were among 10 others in a boat, were said to be fleeing when their boat capsized.

While seven people reportedly swam to safety, the three were unaccounted for.

The corpses floated on Saturday and were recovered by their family members.

The traditional leader of the community, Simenu Peter, confirmed the incident to our correspondent on Sunday.

Peter said the attack started three weeks earlier when some policemen attacked the residents.

He said, "Three weeks ago, the policemen came around 9am and said we should vacate our community. They said we were hoodlums and we said no. I told them that we were fishermen.

"Later in the night, the policemen showed up again and beat up two people who were sleeping. One of them is still in a critical condition. Property, including sacks of foodstuffs, of the residents, was taken away.

"Four days ago, the task force officials came and chased residents again. That was around 11pm. While some of them were running away in a boat, they had an accident. There were 10 of them in the boat; seven survived, but three died."

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An official of the Centre for the Defence of Human Rights and Democracy in Africa, Maurice Fangnon, said the Dolphin Divisional Police Officer and Area A Commander had been informed of the first “unprovoked” attack on the community.

He noted that the Lagos State Commissioner of Police, Edgal Imohimi, was also alerted to the incident, adding that the police leadership did nothing about it.

He said, “About 80 per cent of the people in Ilubirin-Oju Olokun are Egun. They have been facing persecution for a long time now and the situation keeps getting worse.

“After successive governments tried to remove them, we took the matter up with the National Human Rights Commission and wrote petitions on the unlawful killings, forced evictions and victimisation going on.

“There is an estate being constructed by the government in the area, which started with the administration of former Governor Babatunde Fashola, and was continued by Governor Akinwunmi Ambode. The government had chased away some of the indigenes and fenced the estate. The indigenes left behind took refuge behind the fence.

“The bodies of the Egun lady, her baby and a 10-year-old boy were recovered from the water on Saturday, after the police attacked the community on Thursday, August 16, 2018, around 10pm,” he added.

A statement by the Convener of Movement of Lawyers for Total Liberation, Ayo Ademiluyi and Fangnon on Sunday, said the task force officials also demolished houses and shops in Idasho community, in the Ibeju Lekki Local Government Area of the state.

“We give notice to the Lagos State Government and their acolytes in the Nigerian Police Force that this latest onslaught will not be taken lying low after eviction of over 20 informal communities in the past three years,” the statement added.

The spokesperson for the task force, Taofeek Adebayo, said officials of the agency went to the community, adding that the eviction was without any incident.

He said, “The Lagos State Government, through the task force, went there to clear the shanties in the riverine areas. The illegal shanties had been given 72 hour notice for them to remove their belongings. A study conducted around the shanties showed that criminals and hoodlums had turned the place to a den. These are the people terrorising motorists on the Third Mainland Bridge whenever there is traffic. And the government would not close its eyes and allow criminals to take over the area.