

Harvest of deaths and destruction as soldiers quell protest over Akire's stool

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BOLA BAMIGBOLA writes on the crisis rocking Ikire as a result of the kingship tussle in the town, which has allegedly claimed some lives

For residents of Ikire, headquarters of the Irewole Local Government Area of Osun State, Monday, October 26, 2020, will not be forgotten in a hurry following the crisis that rocked the town, as a protest occasioned by the tussle for the Akire stool turned violent.

By the time the dust raised by the violent clashes settled, as many as six lives had been lost, while unspecified number of residents were wounded. Property belonging to some of the residents was also destroyed.

Some residents believe that the casualties are more, going by the fierceness of the clashes involving some residents protesting against the continued stay on the throne of Oba Olatunde Falabi, who they insisted had been removed by the court and soldiers deployed in the scene.

A resident, Osungbade Adeoye, said so far, six families that lost their members to the violence had been identified, while efforts were on to identify others.

Adeoye gave the names of the dead as Kehinde Akinlabi, Tajudeen Ogunremi, Sodiq Muritala, Wahab Dauda, Abiodun Atoba and Bashiru Jide.

It will be recalled that some protesters had stormed the palace of the Akire on Monday, October 26, demanding Oba Falabi's removal.

The Police Public Relations Officer in the state, Yemisi Opalola, had on the day of the incident confirmed that the monarch was in the palace during the protest and had to be ferried to safety as it turned violent.

Sources near the scene also said the protest started on a peaceful note, but later turned violent with the protesters and soldiers deployed in the scene engaging each other.

Giving his own account of what transpired during the protest, Adeoye said some protesters disarmed a soldier and went away with his rifle.

He added that the rifle was later returned, but not long afterward, the military men descended on the town and killed several persons, noting that "bodies of many of those killed were packed and taken away."

Adeoye said, "There were court judgments, but the judgments were not enforced by the government. I don't really know the protesters, but they must have felt that the refusal by the Osun State Government to act in line with the decisions of the courts was unbecoming in a civilised society.

"They embarked on a peaceful protest to the palace of the Akire. The protesters were not armed. The Irewole Local Government Council Chairman, Remi Abbas, met the protesters and appealed to them. But unfortunately, during the time, there were also the #EndSARS protests.

"The protesters refused entreaties from the LG chairman, but they were very peaceful in conduct and insisted that the monarch should be removed. Along the line, the monarch was taken out of the palace unharmed.

“While that was on, soldiers arrived at the scene and I was told that they shot a boy (name not given), but the bullet could not penetrate and the soldiers fled. Some of the protesters, who saw what happened, chased the soldiers and the vehicle conveying the military boys fell into a ditch.

“The protesters swooped on the vehicle, got a soldier and disarmed him. The said soldier after losing his gun to the protesters, also escaped from the scene. The soldiers later returned in large numbers and killed many people in the town. The number of those killed could not be ascertained, because the soldiers went away with some of the corpses.

“From our records, we have identified six persons killed by soldiers during the incident.”

Speaking in a similar vein, another resident, identified simply as Sule, said many of the victims were felled by stray bullets, alleging that the soldiers went away with some of the corpses.

Sule, who confirmed that the protesters seized a gun from one of the soldiers, also claimed that some of the families that lost members to the incident chose to quietly bury their relations.

He added that the names of the victims that were eventually compiled were those they could identify, as soldiers allegedly killed people in Alusekere compound and other parts of the town on the day of the protest.

He said the Chairman of the local government, Abbas, was alleged to have invited the military to quell the protest.

Apart from those killed, Sule also said property belonging to one Chief Odetunde Ologbojo and an unnamed former lawmaker were razed by the soldiers.

He stated, “For instance, in Alusekere compound, three people were killed. One of those killed was Kehinde Akinlabi. Many people are also missing and their relations don’t want to talk openly.

“I learnt that the rifle of a soldier was seized from him and after that incident, the soldiers went berserk, killing the residents. We learnt that the Chairman of Irewole Local Government Council, Mr Remi Abbas invited the soldiers to the town.”

When contacted, Ologbojo told our correspondent that his two houses and a car at Olorisaooko's compound were razed by the rampaging soldiers, who stormed his residence around 8am on Tuesday, October 27, 2020.

He said, "Those soldiers, who attacked my house, were in uniform. They arrived at my house around 8am on Tuesday and burnt down my two houses located at Olorisaooko compound and an SUV found on the premises.

"I was attacked because I supported Prince Tajudeen Olanrewaju against the incumbent Akire of Ikire. Many people were also killed and the soldiers took many of the corpses away."

Abbas, while reacting to the allegations levelled against him, denied calling for the deployment of soldiers, saying the protesters attacked the palace and beat up chiefs who were on the premises.

The local government chairman explained that because of the crises across the country at that time, soldiers were the only security men available, adding that as the chairman, he did not have the power to deploy military men.

He said, "As of the day of the incident, which security organisation was on the ground to maintain law and order? If I was the one who deployed soldiers in Ikire, who deployed soldiers in Osogbo and other parts of Osun State in the same period? There was a crisis in the town and there was looting of palliatives everywhere.

"The governor of the state imposed 24-hour curfew across the state. There was a heavy presence of soldiers and people could not come out. That particular time, some people came out in Ikire and attacked the palace.

"I hope you recall that during the period, there were protests and soldiers were deployed across the state. They were the ones available at that time. Despite that, some people came out and attacked Akire's palace. So, the governor should be looking at them to be destroying things?

"Then the soldiers came. They came for peace. The first set of soldiers that came never fired a shot. But they were attacked. Some of them were wounded.

“Two guns and a box full of ammunition were taken from them. Also, their Hilux van was burnt down and you said soldiers should not react? If anyone was shot, since they said there was shooting, you want to confront soldiers and you say they would not shoot you?”

“They are fighting over a kingship tussle and the case is still in court and not yet finally decided, but some people moved to take over the palace. Some chiefs were beaten up, their property destroyed and part of the palace was also destroyed. I don’t have the power to deploy soldiers.

“Soldiers were the only security agents available throughout the nation. The first set of soldiers that came were just about eight or thereabout and they were appealing for peace.

“But the protesters attacked them, took their guns and burnt their vehicle. The incident cost the community a lot of money, as we have to purchase another vehicle to replace the burnt one. I don’t have the power to deploy soldiers.”

Meanwhile, counsel for the victims, Femi Falana Chambers, said it had taken up the matter.

A lawyer from the firm, Taiwo Olawanle, said it had been briefed by the affected persons and that work had already commenced on the complaints.