

# Protest rocks Ogun as Customs, smugglers' clash leaves one dead

Published February 3, 2021

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Sagamu Interchange

## Daud Olatunji, Abeokuta

Rice traders in Ogun State on Tuesday staged a protest following a clash between their members and operatives of the Nigeria Customs Service.

One person was reported to have died during the clash, which occurred along the Sagamu Interchange/Abeokuta Expressway, Ogun State.

No fewer than seven others were said have been injured in the incident.

Our correspondent gathered that among those who sustained bullet injuries were three customs officers and a soldier.

*PUNCH Metro* gathered that trouble started when some traders conveying rice to Sagamu from Abeokuta on Tuesday ran into customs operatives attached to the Federal Operations Unit, Ikeja, Lagos, who intercepted the goods.

A source said there was resistance from some hoodlums allegedly working with the suspected smugglers, leading to crossfire with the security operatives.

Our correspondent further gathered that the customs officials called for reinforcement and were joined by soldiers in the gun battle.

The source said those who sustained gunshot injuries were rice traders and not smugglers.

He said, “We buy rice from Abeokuta and sell to our customers in Sagamu. Whenever we get our goods from here and we see customs on the road, we normally do bookings with them.

“But to my surprise this morning (Tuesday), after doing bookings, on our way going after Siun junction, another set of customs intercepted our goods from the same Federal Operations Unit.

“We were like, ‘What happened? We met your people over there. What happened?’ They called soldiers for backup. Soldiers squatted on the road and started shooting. Four people were injured.”

When contacted, a spokesman for the FOU, Ikeja, Theophilus Duniya, described the incident as a mob attack on customs officers by hoodlums “working with smugglers.”

According to him, the operatives, acting on intelligence, intercepted six vehicles laden with foreign parboiled rice on the Abeokuta Expressway.

“Upon the interception, some armed hoodlums working in support of smugglers swiftly mobilised themselves and attacked our officers in their bid to prevent the seizure from being taken away.

“However, in the crossfire that ensued, our operatives overpowered them and took three of the intercepted vehicles to a warehouse,” he added.

Duniya said three customs officers and a soldier sustained bullet injuries during the attack. He was silent on the death recorded.

He said the wounded officers were receiving treatment, adding that investigation was ongoing to bring the perpetrators of the attack to book.

Meanwhile, angry rice traders stormed the Governor’s Office, Oke-Mosan, Abeokuta, to protest against the attack.

They demanded the intervention of the government to curb attacks by customs.

The Secretary to the State Government, Tokunbo Talabi, who addressed them, assured of immediate interface with relevant authorities.

He also assured that the medical bills of the four victims would be taken care of by the state government.

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