

Two policemen killed, 21 arrested as Anambra Keke operators protest killings, abductions

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Anambra State Commissioner of Police, Tony Olofu,

Tricycle (*Keke*) operators in Awka, Anambra State, on Wednesday, protested against the killing, abduction and harassment of their colleagues by suspected cultists.

PUNCH Metro gathered that three tricycle riders were killed and one person abducted when some cultists attacked tricycle operators at the UNIZIK Junction on Tuesday.

The attack was said to be over levies imposed by the gang, which the *Keke* operators were resisting.

The operators, who carried placards with various inscriptions, alleged that the cultists were sponsored by the government.

Addressing journalists in Awka, the Coordinator, Keke Drivers Welfare Forum, Awka North and South, Mr Osita Obi, said security operatives knew the hoodlums and could bring them to book.

He said, "A lot of our members have been killed, including that of Tuesday. We don't want it again. Keke drivers are tired. We want to operate independently.

"Many of us cannot afford to live in good houses, send our children to good schools and wear good clothes; not because we are not making money, but the loopholes are just too many. We are remitting too much money to cultists; they will maim and kill us if we refuse to comply.

"We want to state clearly that if anything happens to any of us again, people should hold the government responsible because we expect the government

to intervene.

“Keke drivers are willing to pay legitimate government revenues, but obnoxious revenues will no longer be tolerated.”

They claimed to be paying end-of-year-party fee (N4,500), ID card renewal fee (N3,500), state management code fee (N4,000-N8,000), among others.

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However, one of the protesters, Emeka Uzoechi, said failure to conduct elections to replace the current leadership of the union was at the root of the crisis.

He said, “I am an HND holder from the Kaduna State Polytechnic, Zaria. I ventured into this business to be financially independent. We want the state government to compel the leadership to conduct a fresh election so we can assume leadership and be in charge of our affairs. When the election is democratically conducted, those extorting us will be removed from office.”

The Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Transportation, Dr Emma Akpeh, dismissed the claims of the operators that they were compelled to pay levies to cult gangs.

The state Police Public Relations Officer, Mr Ikenga Tochukwu, confirmed the clash at the UNIZIK Junction, adding that two police officers were also killed.

He said, "There was a cult clash at the UNIZIK Junction on Tuesday and the police swung into action. As a result of this, two of our police personnel were brutally murdered. As I speak, 21 persons have been arrested and we are profiling them. Some of them have made useful statements that will help in the investigation.

"Right now, Awka is peaceful, although I don't have any information about the protest today (Wednesday). But I can tell you that there is a situation on ground which the police are dealing with."