

# Anambra community now deserted, after invasion, killings by soldiers – Elder

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By Ikenna Obianeri

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*The Secretary, Land Committee, Akamanator, Ifite-Nteje, Oyi Local Government Area of Anambra State, Emmanuel Anukwu, narrates to **IKENNA OBIANERI** the June 16, 2022 invasion of the community by masked soldiers, who allegedly killed and injured many*

***Your community is said to be presently in a crisis situation as a result of an invasion by soldiers. What led to the invasion?***

It is true that soldiers invaded our community. What led to it was a tussle over the leadership of Ifite Nteje. The issue escalated and some persons invited soldiers into the community. On that very painful day, June 16 to be precise, it happened that even my son was killed while he was coming back from a journey. He met the soldiers on the way into the community and they gunned him down as he attempted to run for his life.

***How did you get to know this?***

It was my wife that called to inform me about it. Someone had called her to tell her about the incident. When I got to the scene, I saw my son in a pool of his own blood. We had to find a hospital to rush him to. The entire community was deserted; all the men in the village had run away; only women and children were left behind.

***How many people were killed that day?***

I don't really have the actual figure of those that died in the attack because apart from those who the soldiers met on the road and killed, some other people were hit by stray bullets in their various houses. The soldiers were just spraying bullets with reckless abandon; there was one person whose body was riddled with bullets, who later died. They also arrested and took many people away. We don't know where they took them to. Those who managed to escape have not returned to the community out of fear. Everybody is running away, deserting the community, because when these soldiers come, they go from house to house and start picking anybody they find, especially young persons, and nobody knows where they take them to. It is when one knows their destination that one can put up efforts. No effort can be made in the middle of the crisis and that is why we are seeking an end to this crisis.

***How many people do you think are missing so far and how many have died?***

The day we held a rally, one person was massacred with machete on his way to visit his wife. The number of people that we know are missing now is over 50 and over 10 persons that we know of have so far been killed, including my son. The missing ones we don't know where the soldiers took them to up till now. In the midst of it, they also arrested our President General and beat him to a stupor. He is in the hospital now receiving treatment.

***It was gathered that some buildings were also damaged in the course of this crisis. Is that true?***

Yes. Over 20 houses were destroyed in the crisis. Some were burnt down while some were shattered with bullets.

***What time of the day did the soldiers come into the community?***

They arrived around 11am.

***It is true that the soldiers came in search of members of the Eastern Security Network, which is the paramilitary arm of the Indigenous People of Biafra?***

That was what they said in order to justify the killings. It was to call a dog a bad name in order to justify its killing. These youths they have killed or chased away from the community have nothing to do with ESN; they were defenceless youths who were faced with fierce-looking soldiers – the kind (of soldiers) that I had never seen before. The soldiers wore masks. I had never witnessed such a scene, not even in a war zone.

Even if they acted based on an alleged petition, shouldn't they have informed the Divisional Police Officer about the operation? That day, the DPO was very annoyed when he heard about the invasion and killings. They cooked up the lies that we are ESN members in order to justify the atrocious killings. My son was killed in the first operation. My son was not an ESN member. None of those people killed is a member of the ESN.

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***How about the explanation that those killed were ‘unknown gunmen’?***

When you see the corpses of those killed, you will understand better that they were not unknown gunmen. These were defenceless and armless, innocent people who were shot at close range by the soldiers. Anybody with a gun cannot be shot at a very close range like that without putting up any resistance. My 22-year-old son that was killed, was he an unknown gunman? When his corpse and those of other victims were taken to the mortuary, from a look at the corpses, you will know that these people were not ‘unknown gunmen’. When you see ‘unknown gunmen’, you will know by their appearance and on the day they shot my son, the soldiers went away with his motorcycle.

The other people they killed, let them show us the gun they found on them. The young man that was massacred the other day after our rally, is that one also an ‘unknown gunman’? These people they killed were not unknown gunmen or ESN members; they don't have guns, the soldiers are using that as a cover-up. The people they have so far killed were innocent and defenceless civilians. When you look at the corpses, you will see that they were shot at close range, meaning that they were innocent and defenceless people.

***You suggested that the soldiers acted based on a petition. Who authored the petition?***

It was the people who want to take over the leadership of the community at all costs. The cause of the crisis is basically leadership crisis; some people want to rule the community at all costs. At the centre of the matter is a scramble for land. These people are desperately fighting to take over the community leadership, so they can be in direct control of the land. That was why they invited the soldiers.

***What steps has the community leadership taken over this issue?***

Last week, we held a peaceful rally. Some of the youths, who had fled the community, came down to participate fully. The rally was held to draw the attention of the state government and the security agencies to the invasion. It was also to debunk the claim that we are members of the Eastern Security Network. We demanded that soldiers should stop killing us. We are trying to make sure that the government steps into the matter, because there was another disaster about two days ago, as the same soldiers invaded the community

again, and this time around, one house was razed down and they were also picking people one by one to an unknown destination. Right now, we don't know the whereabouts of our community members that were picked. Those people picked have remained incommunicado. The soldiers came in the name of arresting them.

Our rally was also to call for peace and an end to the continual invasion by soldiers. We commenced the rally from the police station and went round the community and later converged on the village hall. Can you believe that while we were at the hall, these soldiers came again in an attempt to attack us or whatever. It took the intervention of the police officers who were with us to stop them from carrying out any attack on us.

***Has the community reported the case to the military authorities?***

No. But we are using this opportunity to call on the military high command to come and investigate us properly; they should come in mufti to the community and carry out discreet investigations to ascertain if truly we are ESN members, as alleged. That is what they should have done rather invade the community and be opening fire on innocent people based on a frivolous allegation by some people who are bent on controlling the land in the community.

We are not ESN members, so soldiers should stop invading our community in the name of coming to attack ESN members. These are coordinated attacks carried out by the soldiers and whatever their motives or whatever some people might have wrongly told them in the alleged petition, we are calling on them to come and let us have a dialogue, so that they will know the true position of things. We can't go to the farms anymore, no more social activities in the community. The people they are killing are our children, innocent boys and not unknown gunmen or ESN members.

***Has your son been buried?***

No, because there is tension and fear in the air. Any arrangement we make now is invalid because if we say we should go and pick the corpses of those killed for burial, the soldiers will still attack us again. This is the challenge we have, so we are waiting for the intervention of the government so that when there is a lasting peace, then we can go and get the corpses and give them a mass burial. For now, most of the corpses are still lying in the mortuary.

***Is the community contemplating taking any legal action against the military?***

All we are asking is for peace and normalcy to return to our community. We are begging the state government and other relevant agencies to come to our rescue. They should intervene in this matter; all we need is normalcy to return to our community, our children no longer go to school. We are also asking the military authorities, particularly, to look into the atrocious activities of their men. They should help us to investigate these incidents and see if really their mission in our community is authorised or not. We have never seen a situation like this, even in a case of war, soldiers don't come to a community and open fire on innocent people. We are begging the military, the police, the DSS and other security agencies.

This is bondage because all of us, especially the men, have left our various houses for fear of being picked by the soldiers. We don't live in our houses anymore; people have run to other communities. Many people are hanging around. We staged the protest to draw the attention of the relevant agencies, especially the government, to our plight; so they can then intervene. We are also asking the other people to come and let us have a dialogue so that peace will return.

**Tags:**