

Police hunt killers of four in Anambra over land

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By Ikenna Obianeri

The Anambra State Police Command has said it is in the hunt for the killers of four men in the Agu-Isioye community located on the boundaries of Enugwu Ukwu and Nawfia in Njikoka Local Government Area of Anambra State on Monday when the yet-to-be-identified assailants attacked the community, killing no fewer than four persons and injuring several others.

Although the police initially put the number of dead persons at three, *PUNCH Metro* gathered on Tuesday that one person later died, thereby bringing the death toll to four.

Police
Our correspondent learnt that the killings occurred when some youths and indigenes of the community were invited by the assailants to a piece of land on the pretence that they were buying the said land, only to be rounded up by the armed men who opened fire on them, thereby killing four persons instantly while others escaped with injuries.

Some sources in the area told our correspondent on Tuesday that the incident created panic in the community as people scampered to safety causing injuries due to the gunshots fired by the armed men.

Investigations showed that there had been recurring farmland disputes and issues bordering on land grabbing between the communities over the years. However, accusations and counter-accusations abound that the assailants were allegedly sponsored by unknown individuals from Nawfia, a neighbouring community that shares a land boundary with Enugwu-Ukwu.

But these allegations were vehemently refuted by the leadership of Nawfia community when contacted who blamed residents of Enugwu-Ukwu for arriving at a “hasty” conclusion without allowing the security operatives to conclude investigations on the incident.

When our correspondent visited the community on Tuesday, some of the indigenes in separate interviews put the death toll at over seven persons, although the police said three.

One of the residents who craved anonymity said, “Yes, armed youths stormed our community on Monday evening and dropped many people dead. They were loaded in a Sienna vehicle and entered the community pretending to be land buyers. They lured some of our youths to a particular land.

“Nobody suspected they were heavily armed with guns and machetes until they got to the said land and started firing gunshots at their victims. In the process, both the people who took them to the land were shot, while passers-by and other residents who scampered to safety at the sounds of gunshots sustained varying degrees of injuries. We counted over seven bodies on the ground. The injured victims were rushed to the hospital.”

Also recounting his ordeal from the sickbed, one of the victims of the attack, who identified himself as Emeka, said, “I don’t know what happened as I was taken by surprise.

“I received a telephone call from someone to come and check something for him at Agu-Isioye. So, when I got there, the next thing I heard was ‘Everybody, lie down! Everybody, lie down!’ And then, I began to inquire what was happening. I also saw some motorcycles belonging to people who I couldn’t even see there.

“So, as I began to question the person who was saying, ‘Everybody, lie down’, he fired a gunshot at me and also fired the person I was with. And there were also some corpses of some unidentified persons who were murdered and dumped inside the bush there.

“The bullets pierced into my stomach and other parts of my body. I managed to limp from inside the bush to the main road with the bullet wounds before I started seeking the help of some persons who assisted in conveying me to a safer place for medication.

“I thank God that I was able to survive the attack. I recall that I also saw the corpse of an indigene of Agu-Ukwu Nri community who was also killed, and dumped inside the same bush. People should be cautious of that area for now, as some heavily armed men still camp there.”

Taking to her Facebook wall, an indigene of the community, Jennifer O, poured out her agony over the gruesome murder of her only brother, in the attack.

“My brother was a victim, the one in black shorts. And he is an only son, not yet married. We are from Nri not Enugwu-Ukwu. I don’t know why they killed him for us. I have not recovered from the shock. They would have left him for us. An only son gone today (Monday, 9th September, 2024). May the soul of her brother rest in peace and may he and other victims get justice, Amen.”

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In a statement on Tuesday, the Police Public Relations Officer of the State, SP Ikenga Tochukwu, said the Commissioner of Police, CP Nnaghe Itam, had ordered an investigation into the incident and launched a manhunt for the assailants.

He also revealed that the police had visited the scene of the attack and recovered a vehicle abandoned by the assailants, as well as the dead bodies of some of the persons murdered and dumped inside the bush.

The statement read, “The Commissioner of Police, CP Nnaghe Itam, has ordered an investigation into the murder of three persons and left five others seriously injured on Monday 9/9/2024, by 2 pm at Isionye land, a boundary between Enugu Ukwu and Nawfia.

“Preliminary information, revealed that the victims were lured by some individuals through a phone call to the land in the guise of a land transaction and attacked them with guns and machet.

“Meanwhile, the CP has sued for calm as police operatives have recovered the abandoned Sienna vehicle used by the murders.

“The testimonies of the injured victims, who are currently receiving treatment in the hospital are aiding the investigation, while the bodies of the deceased have been deposited at the morgue.

“Further development shall be communicated, please.”

However, in a brief social media post on the incident on Monday, a prominent indigene of Enugwu-Ukwu community, Dr Uche Nworah, condemned the attack and also captured the reactions of some other concerned indigenes of the community and their calls to government regarding the incident.

He titled the post, “Enugwu-Ukwu community seeks Anambra State Government’s intervention in averting a communal crisis with their neighbours, Nawfia.

It read partly, “Leaders and indigenes of Enugwu-Ukwu community in Njikoka Local Government Area of Anambra State, have called on the state government to urgently investigate the killing of some of its indigenes by men allegedly sponsored by unknown individuals from Nawfia, a neighbouring community, also in Njikoka.”

Meanwhile, in a swift reaction, on Tuesday, the President-General of Nawfia, Chief Daniel Okoye, and the traditional ruler, Igwe Daniel Obelle, in a statement, denied the allegations of their involvement in the incident, insisting that the town values peace and dialogue and its people are law-abiding citizens who believe in due process.

The leaders strongly denounced the use of violence to settle disputes and described the incident as an “abomination of the highest order.”

They criticised the people accusing their community for making “hasty insinuations” that the perpetrators were from Nawfia, without waiting for a proper police investigation.

The leaders described the comments as “inciteful, prejudicial, provocative, specious, and insensitive” to the sensibilities of Ndi Nawfia, aimed at raising tension for unknown purposes.

The leaders claimed that their investigation did not suggest any involvement of Nawfia individuals in the violent episode adding that “the unwholesome activities of land grabbers and speculators in Agu Anaocha axis have been documented and brought to the attention of the Anambra State government for necessary action.”