

Tension rises as gunmen kill 18 in Imo communities

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Gunmen

| Uche Okere

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The Imo State Police Command has expressed its determination to unravel the circumstances surrounding the killing of no fewer than 18 people in coordinated attacks by gunmen in several communities in Orsu Local Government Area of Imo State.

PUNCH Metro gathered on Wednesday that the killings occurred in Umukabia, Eziawa, Ihittenasa, Umuhu, Amaoku, and Amaebe, all communities within Orsu LGA on Sunday.

A former Chairman of the Nigerian Human Rights Commission, Prof Chidi Odinkalu, who hails from Orsu, had drawn attention to the incident via his X-handle on Monday.

Odinkalu tweeted, “Information is coming thro of what appears to have been systematic slaughter last night across several communities in Orsu LGA of Imo State, SE #Nigeria, including in Amaebu, Awo-Idemili, Eziawa, Umuhu-Okabia. Interim casualty count ATM is 23 but it looks like it could be higher.

“For obvious reasons, I am unable to share images from the scenes or of the remains of affected persons on this platform. They are too gory for words. The government at various levels – local, state, federal – does not appear to have noticed nor heard any of this.”

The state Police Public Relations Officer, DSP Henry Okoye, confirmed the incident to our correspondent during a telephone conversation saying an investigation had begun.

Okoye said, “The police are aware of the killings and already CP Aboki Danjuma has set up a high-powered security team involving the different security agencies to unravel the case. The CP appeals to people to remain calm.”

PUNCH Metro gathered that the residents had celebrated their annual Masqueraders' Day, involving Umuhu, Amaoku, Amaebe, and the other communities, on Sunday, to mark the Yuletide.

After the masqueraders' show, some holidaying locals who returned for Christmas and New Year decided to go to a drinking joint to have some fun.

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However, our correspondent learnt that it was passers-by who discovered that everyone in the shop was lying in the pool of blood with suspected heavy machete wounds on their bodies.

A source who pleaded anonymity said, "Everybody in the joint, all nine people were discovered dead, whether customers or attendants. They had been butchered with deep machete cuts all over.

"We were just a few blocks away from there and nobody heard any sound of gunshot or argument. We suspect that it was members of the Indigenous People of Biafra and Eastern Security Network that are behind this," he said.

Furthermore, he said three corpses were discovered in Umukabia consisting of family members, five corpses in Eziawa village, and another five corpses in Ihittenasa all with machete cuts that same January 5.

"I can't explain how these incidents happened and nobody noticed. There were three people in Umukabia, five in Ezinwa, and another five in Ihittenasa villages and nobody saw the killers come in nor when leaving. Orsu lost 18 promising lives in one day.

“We suspect that these killings were done with inside collaboration with Orsu boys who are members of IPOB and ESN members that we don’t know”, the source said.

Orsu had for four years been under the control of the proscribed IPOB and ESN who succeeded in chasing out the locals.

However, the military had sustained a massive onslaught on the groups and successfully recovered some communities which made people to start returning to Orsu gradually including the holidaying victims.

Meanwhile, a police source who pleaded anonymity told *PUNCH Metro* the killers were trying to instil fear into Orsu people and make them leave their communities again.