

How land grabbers led Nasarawa police to kill seven in Lagos market

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File Copy: The land in Owode

Ibrahim Adam

Broken windshields, shattered headlights and dented car frames littered the ground of Owode-Onirin Motor Spare Parts Market, Lagos State.

No fewer than 50 vehicles had been destroyed.

Traders stood in clusters, many with their hands on their heads as they stared helplessly at the remains of their damaged property and goods.

But beyond vandalised property, seven souls were also reportedly lost.

The victims were reportedly shot dead by policemen and suspected land grabbers allegedly led by one Abiodun.

Five of the deceased persons were identified as Wale Adebayo, Akinboye Oluwaseyi, Taiye Adeoye, Mufutau Salaudeen, Idowu Abraham.

This was contrary to an earlier claim by the police that three people died in the incident, which happened on Wednesday.

The police spokesman, Benjamin Hundeyin, had also declared Abiodun wanted in connection with the mayhem.

When Saturday PUNCH visited the market on Thursday, the atmosphere was still tense.

A trader, who identified himself only as Kayode for security reasons and helped in rushing victims to the Ikorodu General Hospital, recalled that the attackers stormed the market on Tuesday night.

According to him, the hoodlums threatened traders with guns and cutlasses and destroyed many vehicles.

“The next morning (Wednesday), policemen arrived. Instead of protecting us, they started shooting. Seven people died and are now at the Ikorodu General Hospital. We also have five others who were seriously injured.

“Two students going to lesson were hit and also died. One injured victim’s family had to take him away to remove the bullet because he was in so much pain,” he added.

Saturday PUNCH could not, however, confirm the killing of any student as the school they purportedly attended denied losing anyone.

Another witness, Dayo, tied the violence to a lingering land dispute, alleging that Abiodun was laying claim to a part of the market.

“This land is the cause of the crisis. Abiodun has been disrupting the market, claiming the land belongs to him. He keeps sending his boys to cause trouble,” he stated.

Dayo noted that vehicles worth millions of naira were vandalised.

“Over 50 vehicles were destroyed. One car owner was initially angry that his vehicle was damaged, but when he saw the corpses, he quietly drove away,” he added.

A third witness, who spoke on condition of anonymity, recounted how chaos erupted when policemen stormed the market on Wednesday.

He said, “We thought the police came to protect us after the land grabbers attacked the previous night. Instead, they shot at us and people died.”

The witness alleged that while thugs loyal to Abiodun fired at traders from a nearby hotel, bullets from the police hit people.

“There is a hotel close to us called E74. As the police were shooting, Ariori’s boys were also firing at us

He noted that victims injured during the invasion were struggling to access medical treatment due to lack of ambulances.

Lagos hospital confirms four deaths

At the Ikorodu General Hospital, the Chief Medical Director, Public Relations Officer, and one of the victims of the incident were brought in for treatment.

They, however, declined further comment, demanding an official letter from our reporter.

But a highly credible official, who asked not to be quoted as he was not authorised to speak to the press, said four corpses were deposited at the hospital’s mortuary.

The source said, “Initially, three people died on the spot and four were injured. The four were taken to a theatre and operated on.

“Unfortunately, one of them died. That brought the number of dead victims to four. One other person was critically injured. The casualty figure may be more because some of them were taken to other hospitals.”

Family demands corpse

Meanwhile, grief-stricken relatives of the victims have expressed shock at the incident.

Michael Olorunnado, uncle to one of the deceased, Taiwo, described him as a peaceful and hardworking young man.

He pleaded for the release of his body for burial.

He said, “We heard he was shot in the leg and rushed here, but he died before reaching the General Hospital. Why will the police open fire? Is this how to work? All we want is for them to release his body so we can bury him. He was a good and easygoing boy. We even had to lie to his wife before telling her what happened.”

Another family member, Ayoola, said his brother, Akeem Adeoye, was battling for his life after being shot in the stomach.

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He said, “He has undergone surgery after the bullet hit him in the stomach and shin. Traders contributed N370,000 for his scan and operation.”



One of the damaged vehicle

How land grabbers started mayhem — Market leader

The Chairman of the Owode-Onirin Motor Spare Parts Market, Abiodun Ahmed, identified the policemen behind the attack as men of the Nigeria Mobile Police Force.

He noted that the cops shot directly at people as he confirmed seven deaths.

The chairman explained that several others sustained injuries.

Ahmed linked the violence to an ongoing land dispute, and blamed it on suspected land grabbers working with the Agboyi-Ketu Local Council Development Area to demolish shops and take over land.

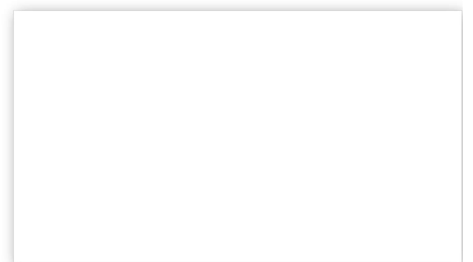
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According to him, the Owode-Onirin market was established in 1979 by former governor, late Lateef Jakande.



He said traders had continued to remit revenue to the Agboyi-Ketu LCDA, which administered the land.

The chairman recounted that thugs first invaded the market on March 6 around 4.30am to demolish a section of the market.

Ahmed stated that efforts to resolve the matter had been frustrated, with repeated petitions filed against the market leaders.

He alleged that he had been detained many times at Alagbon, Zone 2, and the Lagos State Police Command, Ikeja.

He said the crisis escalated after a meeting at the office of the Assistant Inspector-General of Police, Zone 2, where parties were asked to engage surveyors to establish boundaries.

Ahmed said, “On March 6, we saw the land grabbers. Before then, we saw them in October last year, but they were unable to do the bad things that they wanted to do. So they came back on March 6 around 4.30am. They demolished all the shops inside the market.

“We have three sections in the market; there is Owode Metal Scrap Association. Ours is all the old motor spare parts, and the third place they demolished was the Agbajowo Scrap and Aluminum section.

“They encroached on our own land. They said they wanted to release 40% of the land to us. The local government came after then to say they wanted to build shops for us, but we did not agree. It means they are the ones doing it and asking them to demolish our shops. We saw a letter that Agboyi-Ketu LCDA wrote to the Lagos State Government that they should give them permission to demolish the market.

“He then wrote petitions against everybody. We always answered petitions from the police. I was taken to Alagbon FCIID, and I spent two days there. I was taken to Zone 2 and Police Command Ikeja because of this case without committing a crime. Even the AIG Zone 2 said I am a peacemaker. I always beg them, ‘Let’s settle this thing amicably, we don’t want to fight.’ And because of this case, I’ve been begging them.”

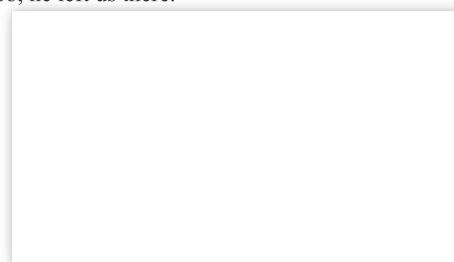
He said on Tuesday, he was called to report at the office of the AIG again.

On arriving at the zonal office, he was served a petition reportedly filed by the suspected land grabber, Abiodun.

Abiodun was said to have also arrived at the police office around 5pm after he was called.

“So, the AIG said he (Abiodun) had to bring his surveyor and we should bring ours to measure the land. He got angry and said was that what the AIG would tell him? He said he was expecting the AIG to tell us to leave the place for him to do whatever he wanted with the land.

“He then said, ‘I’ll carry on to the high level’. Our lawyer was there and heard what he said that day. So, he left us there.



“The IPO called us inside and asked one of our leaders to write a statement. In the process of writing a statement, we got a call that Ariora had taken about 100 thugs to Owode. They destroyed over 100 vehicles, including cars, SUVs, Jeeps, trucks, pick-ups, and others.”

Ahmed noted that the Lagos State Commissioner of Police later visited the market and invited the traders for further talks.

“The commissioner gave us a message that the IG was asking us to come to Abuja tomorrow (Friday) again with the families of all the deceased,” he added.

A top source confided in Saturday PUNCH that the cops were attached to the Nasarawa State Police Command.

Our correspondent gathered that the three policemen involved in the incident had been arrested and transferred to Abuja on the instruction of the Inspector General of Police.

Council chairman counters traders

But the Chairman of Agboyi-Ketu LCDA, Adetola Abubakar, distanced the council from the incident, stressing that the local authority knew nothing about it.

The chairman said the incident was a dispute between the Olowo family, who were judgment creditors,

She described Abiodun as an agent of the Olowo family, adding that he was not connected to the council.

“We must stress that we are not parties to the violence that occurred. Our priority is peace and ensuring conflict.

“The local government has no knowledge of the incident that happened on Wednesday. Since March, when the chairman intervened to restore peace with the assistance of the police, no local government official has been to the Owode Onirin land,” Abubakar said.

Providing background to the dispute, the chairman explained that the entire Owode land covered 26.663 hectares, with a Certificate of Occupancy issued to the local government in 2024.

However, she explained that the Olowo family had laid claim to 4.408 hectares as far back as 1994 and secured judgment in their favour in 1998.

Attempts to enforce that judgment were unsuccessful until March 2024, when the Lagos State Building Control Agency demolished structures on the contested portion, which triggered unrest.

According to the chairman, the governor directed the Attorney General of Lagos State to mediate, and meetings were held in April and May.

At one of the sessions, the Olowu family reportedly agreed to release 40 per cent of the land to the council for resettlement of displaced traders.

She said the Owode people rejected the arrangement, relying on relocation letters from the Jakande era.

“The Attorney General made it clear that those letters were not title documents, but only licences to trade. He assured us he would call another meeting between the local government and the Owode people. That is what we are waiting for,” Abubakar said.

IG orders probe

The Public Relations Officer, Zone 2 Police Command, CSP Ayuba Umma, said she was not aware of the invitation but confirmed that the zone was handling the matter.

The Nasarawa State Police Public Relations Officer, SP Ramhan Nansel, declined to comment on the involvement of policemen from the command.

Rather, he referred our reporter to the Lagos police command headquarters.

The Force Public Relations Officer, Olumuyiwa Adejobi, confirmed the incident in a WhatsApp message to Saturday PUNCH, stressing that the police leadership was committed to ensuring fairness and transparency.

According to him, the IG has mandated a “thorough investigation” into the matter, with the Force Criminal Investigation Department now handling the matter.

Adejobi said, “Let’s wait for the outcome of the investigation. Justice will be served in the case, and we urge all parties to remain calm, be law-abiding, and peaceful.”

