

One killed, two injured as soldiers disrupt festival in Delta community

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The annual Iwaaji (roasting of new yam) festival in Ogwashi-Uku Kingdom, Aniocha South Local Government Area of Delta State turned bloody at the weekend when soldiers invaded the town and allegedly shot residents.

One person was instantly killed, while two others were said to be in critical condition in an undisclosed hospital due to injuries suffered as they were allegedly hit by bullets following the sporadic shootings by the soldiers. Friday's uprising, *Sundry Sun* gathered, was not unconnected with the kingship tussle over who is the occupant of the throne between the Izedunor lineage and the Okonjo lineage.

The state government had presented the staff of office to Prof. Chukwuka Okonjo as the Obi of Ogwashi-Uku Kingdom following his victory at the lower courts. However, Okonjo's victory at the lower courts is being challenged by the Izedunor lineage at the Supreme Court and as such the police advised both parties to maintain the status quo until judgement was delivered.

But Friday's festival by the Izedunor faction was said to have been disrupted by a detachment of two trucks of soldiers who allegedly shot sporadically,

killing one person instantly while two others were severely wounded.

A community source said "on the day of the festival, the Ekei Market is not supposed to hold. So the Izedunor lineage had gone to tell the market women to close shop for some hours but when the Okonjos heard about it, they brought in the soldiers to make sure the festival did not hold."

However, another source loyal to the Okonjo faction said trouble started when the Izedunors mobilised to prevent Obi Okonjo who is the father of Nigeria's Finance Minister, Prof. Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala from entering the palace to perform the New Yam festival rites.

"What happened is that tradition demands that the Obi (King) would enter the palace to perform certain rituals associated with the festival and that the market for that day should temporarily relocate to where the palace is located for the purpose.

"However, those who are opposed to the Obi's rulership mobilised some youths to prevent him from entering the palace. The soldiers were trying to quell the tension but they shot and some persons were hit by bullets," said the source.

Meanwhile, the incident has attracted condemnation from some quarters as one of the stakeholders in the community, one Akaaze accused the soldiers of intimidation and killing defenceless residents.