

Communal clash: 15 feared dead in C' River communities

FROM JUDEX OKORO,
CALABAR

Fifteen persons have been feared dead in a clash between the neighbouring communities of Ediba and Usumutong in Abi Local Government Area of Cross River state.

The cause of the hostility may not be unconnected with the dispute over the ownership of a farmland located at the boundary of the two communities. Sunday Sun gathered that there had been age long disagreement between the warring villages over the ownership of the said land. According to a reliable source, the dispute got to a climax when the Usumutong people, sensing that the court may soon rule on the disputed land, allegedly abducted some natives of Ediba and took them to an unknown destination.

In the reprisal attack allegedly carried out by Ediba youths, the source said, some Usumutong people were killed. Since then, both com-

munities have been applying guerrilla tactics in prosecuting the war.

Although the actual figure of casualties is yet to be ascertained, one of the elders of Ediba community who does not want his name in print, told Sunday Sun that about fifteen people had so far lost their lives in the internecine war.

According to him, "Ediba has lost about 5 persons, while Usumutong community recorded no fewer than 10 casualties. Economic activities in the area have been paralysed as a result of the ongoing hostility. Sunday Sun gathered that Usumutong people are now finding it difficult to transport their farm produce through Ediba axis for fear of attack by youths." It was gathered that an outbreak of violence which occurred last week between the two communities led to loss of some lives. There are also apprehensions that another fresh crisis may be looming as both sides continue to trade accusations over an attack on some Usumutong boys who were

transporting rice to Afikpo in Ebonyi state.

A 32-year-old transporter, who identified himself as Christopher, accused Ediba people of trying to use economic blockade to subdue Usumutong. He disclosed that Ediba warriors had laid siege on the only access road to Usumutong thereby preventing natives of that community from coming either to Ugep in Yakurr Local Government Area or Itigidi headquarters of Abi to do business.

However, in a bid to restore peace to the communities, Cross River State Government has declared the disputed land as a buffer zone just as it was deployed soldiers to the communities.

Similarly, the Senate Leader, Chief Victor Ndoma-Egba (SAN), has donated food items to Usumutong and Ediba communities. Items donated by Ndoma-Egba include 150 bags of rice; 16 cartons of cooking oil; 10 cartons of magi cubes; 80 cartons of tomato paste and 100 cartons of Indomie noodles. These items were

received by the Chairman of Abi Local Government Area, Mrs. Edith Amadi.

The Senior Special Adviser to the Senate Leader, Mr. Lawrence Agbor Takon, who made the presentation, said the donation was to alleviate economic hardship being experienced by the people as a result of disruption of economic activities in the two communities, adding that there is the need to show love and understanding for one another in this Easter season.

His words, "Since there was no full blown war, the senator has decided to appreciate the two communities this Easter season. These are not relief materials. They are meant for the celebration of the Easter."

The Chairman of Abi Local Government Area, Edith Amadi, commended Senator Ndoma-Egba for his gesture and genuine concern for peaceful co-existence of the people. She promised to distribute the items to the two communities evenly, saying that her quick intervention in their face-off has helped to nip the crisis in the bud.