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BY OUR REPORTER ON NOVEMBER 15, 2015

COVER

...Shops closed as AUR officials, traders clash

FROM: OKEY SAMPSON, ABA

Four persons were feared dead yesterday in Aba, the commercial hub of Abia State while scores of others

were wounded and goods worth millions of Naira destroyed as traders at the Ahia Ohuru Market annex clashed with officials of Aba Urban Renewal Committee (AUR), compelling shop owners in the city centre

to close for business.

Aba Urban Renewal Committee, headed by Mr. Solomon Ogunji was set up by the Abia State government and saddled with the responsibility of restoring the Master Plan of Aba.

A victim of the incident who gave his name as Ifeanyi Nwosu told journalists that last Wednesday, the leader of the group, Solomon Ogunji visited their shops with some of his boys and poured fuel on their wares and set them on fire.

He said they never reacted that day as good citizens of the state, in the hope of sending emissaries the following day to Ogunji's office to find out his boys took the action.

Continuing he said: "The next day, before we could send our representatives as planned, Ogunji came again after some people who had collected N120 daily ticket and started destroying our wares again. He (Ogunji)

Asked us to go over to the Good Morning Market and continued in his act. We don't know what happened between him (Ogunji) and a trader which resulted in a fight and in the process, the Tricycle and Toyota

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car they came in were set ablaze.”

He said when they thought everything was over, about 7am yesterday before the traders could arrive the market, youths and thugs wearing reflective jackets, wielding machetes and sticks had started setting goods ablaze.

When some of the traders attempted to protect their goods, they were dealt machete cuts and beaten with sticks.

Nwosu said the traders were not given any quit notice by AUR, adding, “it was during the administration of former Governor Theodore Orji that they were asked to move to the Good Moring Market, but when that government found out that there was no space in the market it allowed us to remain where we have been over the years.”

He said they were surprised that suddenly, the Ogunji led team resurfaced from nowhere and started burning their goods and telling them to move to the same market that could not accommodate the traders. It was gathered that while the AUR team was destroying the goods of the traders, the traders challenged them and in the ensuing fracas, four people were allegedly shot dead by the same Abia State Vigilance Service personnel who accompanied the team to the market.

About ten traders were said to have sustained gunshot wounds and machete cuts during the fracas and where they are receiving medical hospitals where they are receiving medical attention.

It took the combined efforts of soldiers and the police to quell the fracas and open some of the roads blocked by youths who mounted roadblocks at Azikiwe by Adazi and some others.

Over 25 army and police Toyota Hilux vans were seen patrolling the city centre even as traders who spoke to journalists accused the AUR of hiring miscreants and using Abia Vigilance Service personnel to unleash mayhem on them.

Ogunji was yet to respond to text message sent to his phone as at time of filling this report.

However, Abia State Police Public Relations Officer, DSP Ezekiel Onyeke Udevioutu called for peace and assured that police were investigating the matter.

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