

NIPP high tension kills 7 in Abia

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...Community asks for compensation, protests

...We have paid you –NIPP

From Chuks Onuoha, Umuahia

Seven members of Oronta Village in Oraigwe Community, Nnono, Oboro, Ikwuano Local Government Area of Abia State have died, following alleged demolition of their homes by Niger Delta Power Holding Company, NIPP, operators of National Integrated Power Projects (NIPP), which is running high tension wire from Akwa Ibom to Enugu State.

Over 10 others are said to be battling to survive as the news of the demolition had sent rude shocks to their spines, more so as they were not paid adequate compensations to relocate their homes from its present high tension site.

The President General of Oronta Development Union Federated, Sir Friday Chibudo Ifenkwe, who disclosed this to newsmen in Umuahia, as he led hundreds of protesters to besiege the premises of the Federal High Court, Umuahia, protesting the deaths of seven of their members due to the notification/ demolition of their homes and the refusal of the contractors to pay them adequate compensations.

He disclosed that seven worthy citizens of the community, who are below 50 years of age, were cut down by the shock of the demolition/notice issued them by the NIPP contractors who have refused to pay them adequately to relocate to another place. The placards-carrying protesters chanted war songs, calling on the authorities to intervene over the death of seven of their members whose houses have either been demolished or marked for demolition without compensations.

He said that they were at the premises of the High Court to attract the attention of well-meaning Nigerians and the court, which is the hope of the common man.

“What has befallen us is better imagined than experienced by any community, in less than six months, we have lost seven able-bodied men to the carelessness of NIPP and many others are ailing at the sick bed. The NIPP contractors came to our place with a project but never asked us the value of our landed property and buildings. They made us the more you look, the less you see and before one could know what is going on they had with the help of soldiers started demolishing our homes.

“Even the so-called compensation they claimed to have paid to some people was a sham. We are aware that the Federal Government has a procedure for handling such project, so we feel that we have been deceived. The partway was created within the center of the community and my community Oronta is made up of three villages namely, Okpuala, Umungbaru and Obibia; and they created the partway within the built up and heavily populated areas rather than diverting it to a place that is not inhabited by people,” he said. He pointed out that this act alone has divided his people, who had gone to the National Human Right Commission on October 14, 2014, to get an injunction for the contractors to stop work.

“Believing that they would obey court order, we relaxed, only for them to come up with a unexpected notice of demolition with the assistance of the police and army, they forcefully ejected us, erected the pillars, connected the high tension wires and embarked on the demolition of people’s homes,” the president general said.

“So, we are here to seek redress and to ask the court that they should resettle the entire village. Their project cannot divide us, we are one people who have been living together from time immemorial. If they want this project to pass through our community, let them resettle the community or divert the line to the area that is not habited by people. That is why we are here because we believe in the rule of law and know that only the court can defend the defenseless. The army manhandled and subjected our children to inhuman treatments, flogging, beating and taking some of our youths to their cantonment where they were dehumanized. The injunction said that they should not change the existing landscape until the matter is determined. We feel that the process in the human rights court is delayed and instead of sitting down to allow this to continue, we should come to the federal high court for redress,” he said. He explained that their major demand was for their community to be resettled since they can no longer go into the bush to live, as it will look like going back to the dark ages.

“We want this case to be determined as quickly as possible, seven of our men have died because of this very matter, they heard the news of the demolition of their homes and out of shock, they collapsed and died. People like Luke Emeulor, Mark Baba, Azubuike Atuonwu, Godwin Ikoro and many others. The people we have mention are not even old, but those who the shock of the bad news made hypertensive and they could not take it and they died.

But, in a swift reaction, the Managing Director of the consulting firm handling the high tension wire project for NIPP, Mr Ernest O. Uko of Ekere & Associates, insisted that the people have been paid compensations to vacate their homes long before the demolition notice was served them.

"Some time in 2010, we carried out enumeration in that community to identify the impacted properties, had town hall meeting with them, fixed a date for enumeration in which they all participated, and their properties were captured for payment and they have all been paid. I have the prove of all the indemnities they signed with their passports.

"They have all been paid to vacate and given demolition notices, which they signed. We are surprised why they are in court, having collected money to move out of their present place. I did the work as a consultant and the community hired an agent to represent them and their monies were routed through their agents, if their agents were of the opinion that their monies were inadequate, he would have rejected the compensations and they too would not have collected their money, all of them opened bank accounts to collect their money", Uko said.