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3 killed as Customs, police, smugglers clash

— 14th October 2016

By Christopher Oji

A clash among Customs men, police and smugglers has claimed three lives at Alakuko area of Agege in Lagos yesterday.

Some Customs officers from the Federal Operations Unit (FOU) were chasing suspected smugglers conveying rice. They allegedly shot at the vehicle, killing three persons.

Policemen from the Alakuko Division, who tried to arrest the Customs officers

were unsuccessful as the latter shot their way to escape.

Sympathisers including street urchins took to the streets protesting the death of the three victims. Hoodlums hijacked the protest and started molesting motorists and other passersby.

Some vehicles were smashed. There was traffic gridlock along the Lagos/Abeokuta Road. The hoodlums barricaded the road.

A witness, John Ogbu, said: "It was around 7 am, I was standing in front of my shop when I saw two vehicles driving recklessly and were being pursued by a Customs patrol vehicle. The officials were firing at the vehicles. Some passersby were hit by bullets.

"I also saw some policemen trying to block the Customs men from escaping and there was exchange of fire," he said.

A senior Customs official who spoke on condition of anonymity, said: "We were doing our job of arresting some rice smugglers and the police were aiding and abating them. In the process, there was a shootout between us. I can't say what transpired, three persons were shot. I learnt that one person died while others were rushed to the hospital. I cannot say who fired the shots. But all I can say is that we were doing a legitimate job when the police obstructed us."

The state's police spokesperson, Dolapo Badmos, a Superintendent, confirmed that one person was allegedly shot dead by Customs. "This morning at about 7 am, Customs officials were on the trail of a vehicle. In the process, they went berserk and started shooting and killed one Saheed Omotosho. His brother, Rasheed, was taken away to an unknown destination. The identities of the Custom's men are not known.

"The Divisional Police Officer (DPO) of Alakuko mobilised his team to the scene to maintain peace," she said

Also spokesman for FOU, an Assistant Superintendent, Jerry Attah, said: "We have no problems with the police. It was a problem between smugglers and the Customs officers. We have arrested one suspect and the exhibits are with us."

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