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Cross River: 17 feared dead in communal, cult clashes

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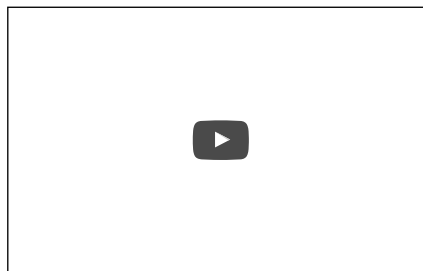
From Judex Okoro, Calabar

Fifteen persons are feared dead in Cross River State communities over land battle.

This was just as cult war has claimed two lives in Yakurr.

While the communal conflict between Wanikade people and their Wanihiem neighbours in Yala Local Government Area took place at the weekend, the two persons were killed in a renewed cult clash between the Supreme Vikings Confraternity (SVC) and Black Axe on Friday, at Ugep, in Yakurr Local Government Area during a confrontation at the palace of the Obol Lapon of Ugep.

Following the cult war, the personal house of the paramount ruler of Yakurr and Obol Lapon of Ugep, Obol Ofem Ubana Eteng, was destroyed by a mob protesting the cult war in the area, for over a week.



This occurred barely a week after about four persons were killed in a communal clash between Akampkpa and Ojor communities in Akampkpa Local Government Area of Southern Senatorial District of the state.

Investigations by Daily Sun indicated that the age-long squabble between the Wanikade and Wanihiem, both in Ukele North of Yala council, over a piece of farm and situated along the boundary of the two communities, have defied solution.

The recent outbreak of hostilities seem to be the climax leading to killing of innocent people and wanton destruction of houses, crops and more farms.

Regarding the incident, Chief Obok Okem, a traditional ruler in Wanikade community, said trouble started when a man from Utolo Ugep, in Wanikade community, cleared his portion of land in readiness for cultivation.

He said surprisingly, a man from Wanihiem, a neighbour, claimed the land belongs to him and went ahead to cultivate the piece of land cleared by the Wanikade person, which led to an altercation between the duo and involvement of the youths.

The youths from Wanikade, in anger, moved in and levelled the heaps planted by the Wanihiem people on the piece of land cleared by the Wanikade person. The Wanihiem youths on their own launched a reprisal, which eventually led to a fight.

"The fight, which witnessed use of guns and machetes, lasted three days and subsequently resulted into killings and destruction of property worth millions, which rendered over 3,000 people homeless," he recounted.

Okem said efforts by elders, on both sides, to stop the youths failed as it led to full-scale war among over five villages, on both sides.

Another witness, James Onah, from Wanihiem, said the fighting raged until Saturday, before soldiers and policemen from Okpoma Area Command could quell the conflict.

"Soldiers have been able to stop the fighting for now after the police could not but, so much destruction has been inflicted on both villages."

Director General of State Emergency, John Inaku, who confirmed the incident, added: "Security situation between Okpuinya in Ogor clan and Wanihiem and Otulo in Otuka clan in Wanikade in North Ukele of Yala is very bad.

"So far, houses have been burnt and property destroyed; there is total chaos in the warring communities.

"Refugees moving into Oju, neighbouring Benue State are many and we are moving in to ascertain the number and how to respond. The conflict started since June 25 and raged on till security moved in at the weakened. So, you can imagine the situation we are in. And this clash is caused by struggle for land."

"So far, about 20 houses have been burnt and about 133 persons have run to Oju in neighbouring community to seek refuge."

Inaku, who said he could not ascertain the actual death recorded so far, said: "We are trying to work with the chairman of Oju Local Government Area in Benue State and Head of Local Government Administration (HOLGA), Yala, Mr. Ekim Ignatius, to see how we can come to their rescue."



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