

Judex Okoro, Calabar

Again, tragedy has hit Bisae Local government, as eight persons have been reportedly killed in a communal clash between Abanwan and Orugbam in Cross River State.

The two warring communities have been at daggers drawn over the struggle for a parcel of land.

However, the latest war allegedly broke out following squabbles between the Abanwan and Orugbam youths over burial arrangements.

The Abawan youths alleged that they first attacked by people from Orugbam during an attempt to paste burial poster.

But in order to avert the looming crisis, the Abanwan people were said to have gone ahead to bury their dead, a woman last Saturday. Then on Monday, they allegedly attacked Orugbam killing three persons.

But in an attempt to avenge the death of their people, the Orugbam launched a reprisal attack on Tuesday but ended up losing five persons believed to be mercenaries.

The mercenaries were said to have been beheaded by the Abanwan youths.

Sources close to the community said that the Orugbam had gone to Ekoli, a neighbouring community in Ebonyi State and hired mercenaries; but were repelled by Abanwan youths who were fully armed.

Not relenting, Abanwan moved in and reportedly burnt down houses and destroyed crops in Orugbam.

An eyewitness from Orugbam, Emmanuel Ogban, said: "As I speak to you, the Abanwan people are burning our village. We are on the run and only God knows when all these will stop.

Explaining how the war started, Ogban said: "A woman died in Abanwan and was to be buried last Saturday. About six youths from Abanwan went to various neighbouring communities to paste posters in the area as a way of advertising her burial.

"They went to Ibini and pasted some posters but when they arrived at Orugbam, some people waylaid them.

"The Abanwan people decided to bury the woman on Saturday but attacked us on Monday.

"I don't like what our people are doing because we are all one; we speak the same dialect."

A woman from Orugbma who gave her name as Margaret said: "Right now, only churches are left in Orugbam. We have always known that this situation will come to this because Orugbam has always caused problems in Erei community.

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"Remember that Orugbam had invaded Ebor and Ipene in the past, killing people. So, Orugbam's action is that they have come to the limit of patience.

"What may have irked Abanwan people is that Orugbam went to a nearby community, recruited some people and gave them military uniforms. When the people arrived at Abanwan and discovered that the youths there were waiting for them, they ran away, leaving some Orugbam youths behind. Five of those youths were killed today."

But a witness from Abanwan, Willy Okoh, said: "I can tell you Orugbam caused this latest fight even though we have been having land issue with them. They attacked us last Saturday and we retaliated on Monday. But while observing the cease-fire and waiting for army intervention, the Orugbam hired mercenaries to attack us yesterday not knowing that we were keeping vigil.

"On seeing them, we went on the attack and apprehended five of them; we beheaded them while a few of our people were wounded."

Reacting, the Police Public Relations Officer (PPRO), Ms. Irene Ugbo, confirmed the outbreak of hostilities but insisted that no official death has been recorded.