

...Many dead, billions lost, as crisis over land spreads death, destruction

22nd November 2019 *in*

0

SHARES VIEWS

Ogbonnaya Ike

An incessant land dispute in Isuaniocha community in Awka North Local Government Area of Anambra State has turned to a bloody war, with the killing of 10 people and destruction of property worth billions of naira.

Residents have fled their homes in fear, while families, mostly elderly men, women and children now live as refugees in neighbouring towns.

Hell broke loose in the area in 2018 following the illegal taking over of hectares of land originally given to the Community Secondary School, Isuaniocha, by some group of people within and outside the community. The takeover of the disputed land by some individuals and their cronies continued amidst protests, leading to the manhunt of perceived opponents, as well as killing and destruction of property at an alarming scale.

When the reporter visited the community recently, the area was like a war-devastated region, with several houses and cars bearing scars of ruins and destruction. Several buildings were deserted by their occupants, while some residential homes were locked with charms and keys. Further attempt by this reporter to move to the land in dispute was greeted with a stern warning not to cross the line or risk vicious attacks by armed hoodlums.

Some of the residents said they live in constant fear of attacks and appealed to the Federal Government to wade into the dispute to avert further loss of lives.

A community leader, Chief Anthony Onyeagolu, a native of Otoko Community in Isuaniocha, has sent a petition to the Chairman, Police Service Commission, Abuja.

In the petition, he said the community had lost its peace and appealed to the commission to intervene and avert further loss of lives. He said the community had suffered irretrievable losses with the killings of innocent people and destruction of property worth billions of naira.

Similar petitions were sent to the Inspector General of Police, Mohammed Adamu, the Senate President, Ahmed Lawan and the Senate Chairman on Ethics, Privileges and Public Petitions, Dr Pat Ayo Akinyelure, seeking their intervention to save the community from further crisis and loss of innocent lives.

Onyeagolu said 10 indigenes of the community, most of who he claimed were men, had been murdered and secretly buried in unknown graveyards to cover the heinous crimes. He explained that the families of those killed, particularly their wives and children, have been crying for justice but to no avail. More heart-breaking, he said, was the pathetic state of children who have been thrown out of schools as a result of the prolonged crisis.

Among the houses destroyed was the residential home of Festus Onyeagolu at Otoko Village. It was reported that the armed hoodlums also smashed glass windows, cars and other valuable property and threatened to kill anyone that steps into the

building again. It was alleged that the hoodlums burgled the expansive building, carted away valuable items and tore down the beautiful edifice.

Onyeagolu alleged that the hoodlums equally stole vital documents and land title documents, and used same to auction off their family lands as well as other lands he acquired through purchase.

Former President General of the Community, Tony Onyeagolu, confirmed that the unrest in the community was triggered by the community land earlier given to the public secondary school in the area. He said the land crisis led to the death of Ifeanyi, Chukwuebuka, Angus Okoye, Bonah, Ozor Childa, Mogbo and others, who were mowed down by assailants.

Also speaking, Rev Fr Kenneth Ekweariri, who was in-charge of Christ the King Parish, Isuaniocha at the heat of the crisis, urged the Federal Government, Governor Willie Obiano of Anambra State and other relevant agencies to intervene urgently in the community to forestall further degeneration of the crisis.

Other natives of the community counted their losses, noting that they live like refugees in neighbouring communities for fear of returning to the troubled area.

The aggrieved villagers lamented that complaints made to the Anambra State Police Command, and other police formations yielded no results.

As aggressive hoodlums parade the troubled community with arms, the area has become a minefield. The natives are forced into hiding or risk being cut down in the crossfire.

The state Police Public Relations Officer could not be reached for comments, but a senior police officer assured that investigations were ongoing, noting that the police were capable of handling the situation.