

Covid-19 taskforce kills 1, injures 2 in Ebonyi

■ Council boss, lawmaker trade blames

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Chijioke Agwu, Abakaliki

Anti-coronavirus taskforce in Atikpo South local government area of Ebonyi state has allegedly killed one Chidi Agwa Arua and shot two others at Nguzu Edda area of the council.

The team allegedly sent by the Chairman of the council, Eni Iduma Chima, was in the area to enforce the state government's directive against public gathering in the state.

Saturday Sun gathered that the team's attempt to stop an event holding at the compound of the member representing Afikpo South West in Ebonyi State House of Assembly, Mr. Nkemka Okoro Onuma, was resisted

by boys loyal to the lawmaker which led to a shoot out between the taskforce and the boys loyal to the lawmaker.

In the melee, the taskforce allegedly killed one of the boys and inflicted gunshot injuries on two others.

Narrating the incident, Nkemka Okoro Onuma, dismissed the report that the event was holding in his compound, stressing that in line with the government directive he had directed members of his constituency to cancel any events slated to hold in the area pending when government lifts the ban on social gathering.

He described the incident as a deliberate plot by his political enemies to put him in trouble for future political gains. He said “if there is a family that hosted social gathering, that wasn’t to my knowledge, and since my own family wasn’t involved in such gathering, no matter how low key, it never held in my

home or was I part of it.

“But to my surprise, some persons on Friday visited Nguzu who I gathered came from the neighbouring Ekoli community. I was later told from sources that they were sent by the local government chairman, Hon. Eni Uduma Chima to enforce the no-social-event order.

“And what I still have not found answer to is why the enforcers left wherever any such event held to come to my home banging at my gate and threatening to force their way in to stop a gathering I never hosted.

“I never hosted any gathering as stated earlier, but as someone representing a people, whenever I am home, there must be people in my native place, at least my relations, that come around. So I was home sitting in the compound, outdoors in a walled premises with the gate open in the company of some few people not more than 10 persons when the enforcers said to be sent by the chairman forced their way into the compound and started commotion and threatening the people must leave because I flouted the governor’s directive, which wasn’t true.

“The number was far less than what I host every weekend as I frequent my town and someone close to the people he represents.

“After the leader of the team called Mukoro as I was told later had altercation with someone at my gate, he ran back to Ekoli, possibly to report back to his master, Hon. Eni Chima and some hours later, at about 7.30pm came back reinforced with a team of armed persons who started shooting and trying to force their way into my compound that had been locked then.

“Because my people saw this as affront, I was told some of the young people took it for invasion of their town by neighbours and tried to stop them. After all, they were not from the law enforcement, didn’t wear uniforms and unidentifiable.

“During this melee, they shot three persons, and one of them died. All these people that were shot are from Nguzu, my town. For the records, these persons who were armed are not security personnel or operatives of any known law enforcement body. And in all these crises, there was no presence of the police that should ordinarily enforce such directive using professional and civil means”

But the council Chairman, Eni Iduma Chima, in his reaction accused the lawmaker of masterminding attacks on members of the anti- coronavirus taskforce who were in his compound to enforce government directive against social gathering.

He further alleged that the lawmaker out of fear of reprisal attack from the taskforce team, arranged boys to protect him which led to breach of public order.

He said “the anti-coronavirus taskforce people accosted Hon. Nkemka about a ceremony that was holding in his compound and they were beaten on his orders, and he was afraid and felt they might regroup and come again. So, he needed crowd to protect him and he mobilized them, but he couldn’t control them and they mounted road blocks and started attacking motorists going to Ekoli and vandalizing their vehicles, even people who are not from Ekoli were also beaten.”

“If you ask motorcyclists in Amasiri they will tell you that Amasiri people were also attacked and their motorcycles burnt and that is the reason Amasiri people are presently seizing motorcycles coming from Nguzu to Amasiri.

“They attacked a former Council Chairman of Afikpo South LGA, Hon. Ogbonnaya Orji, and a Civil Defense personnel in the same vehicle with him, and vandalized the vehicle and inflicted three machete cuts on the Civil Defense personnel.

“I called the Divisional Police Officer (DPO) at that point but when they arrived they refused to disperse. They went and reinforced with mobile policemen and soldiers.

“When the security men came back to remove the blockade, they thought it was Ekoli people that were coming to do reprisal and they opened fire and the soldiers returned fire for fire, and killed one person and recovered his gun and others fled with two of them sustaining bullet injuries. And one good thing is that the soldiers who killed the boy is not denying it. They have made statements both to the Army and the Police authorities. Nkemka is just trying to trivialize and politicize it.” When contacted, Commissioner of Police, Ebonyi state command, Awosola Awotinde, said the matter has not been brought to his attention.