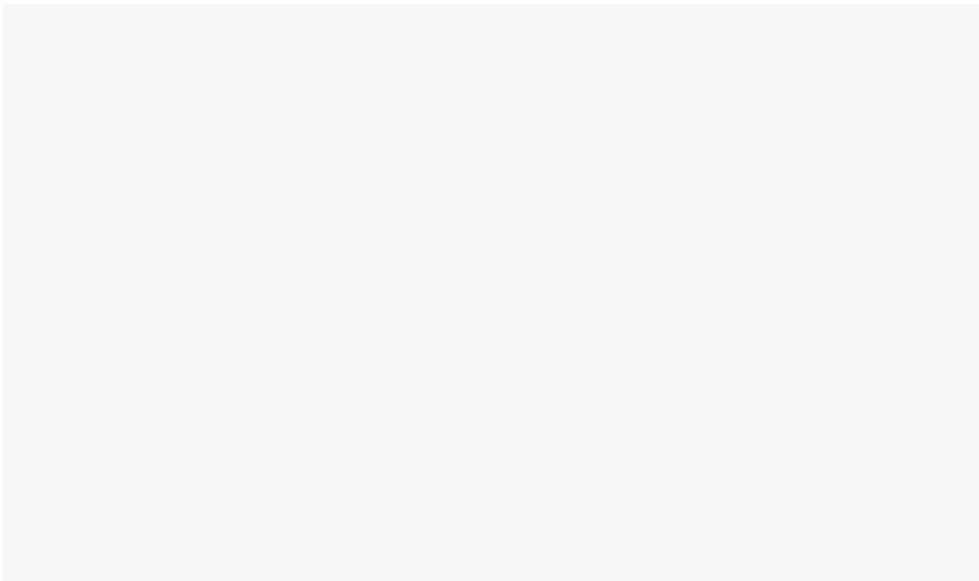


• Communal crisis claims father of four in Ebonyi, scores injured • Ex-commissioner arrested by police, denies complicity

27th June 2020 in

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**Wilson Okereke, Afikpo**

**The police in Ebonyi State are still trying to unravel the circumstances that led to the brutal murder of one Azubuike Oko Inya, a 46-year-old father of four at Amankwo village in Nkpoghor community of Afikpo North Local Government Area of the state.**

A former Commissioner for Border Peace and Conflict Resolution in the state, Chief Donatus Ajah, a.k.a Zentus, was on June 18, arrested by the men of the state police command over his alleged involvement in the murder of

Inya.

Both Ajah and Inya hail from Amankwo village where a misunderstanding had allegedly erupted among the people of Azu Ukwu Ewa in the night of 22nd May 2020, resulting to Inya's death.

#### **Battle for supremacy**

Residents said the skirmish was triggered by supremacy battle between two factions in the community. The two groups were said to be loyal to a former Chairman, Interim Committee of Amankwo Eziukwu Welfare Association, Ifeanyi Obila and the former Commissioner, Ajah.

The former Commissioner's group was alleged to have oppressed people in the area particularly those in the habit of challenging their opinions in the village. It was gathered that the suspected killers had stormed a pub in the village and attacked some villagers; inflicting machete cuts on them, a situation that caused anxiety and pandemonium in the community.

Inya, on hearing the cries of the people at the pub, was said to have rushed to the scene and begged the attackers to stop what they were doing. It was at that point that the hoodlums pounced on him; giving him several machete cuts until he died.

People in the area alleged that one Ifeanyi Ogonnia Chukwu, a known ally of Ajah, perpetrated the heinous act. A resident, Pastor Emmanuel Nwachukwu while giving background information about the incident said that disunity brewed in the community towards the end of last year after Ajah had singlehandedly given out their communal land to a telecommunication company to be used for the installation of mast without the consent of other villagers.

According to him, Ajah allegedly collected over N2million but presented the sum of N700,000 to the community as money for five years lease. Irked by what they perceived as under hand deal, the community rejected the N700,000 and dragged both Ajah and the company to court.

"After Hon Donatus (Ajah) had told us about the business, we requested for either Memorandum of Understanding or duplicate of the cheque given to him but he stoutly refused to provide us with any and having found out that he was not transparent in the deal, around January, 2020, we instituted litigation against him and the company," Nwachukwu said.

Following the position of Ifeanyi Obila and another prominent indigene of the area, Titus Obila, who had insisted that proper account be rendered, the former Commissioner felt aggrieved and allegedly incited his supporters against his opponents. They had allegedly threatened that hell would be let loose in the area if the matter was not withdrawn from court.

Pastor Nwachukwu also said that after Ajah and his cohorts found out that the people in the rival camp were not moved by their warning, they went further and erected some lockup shops at the entrance of Titus Obila's

compound as payback for his adamant position on the issue.

He added that some stakeholders reported the matter to the police and the local government town planning authority after they sensed the imminent danger associated with the illegal construction. The town planning authority visited the site and condemned the construction of the lockup shops on access way. They came back some days later and demolished the structure.

*Saturday Sun* was further told that it was after the demolition that Ajah's supporters allegedly invited into the community a large number of hoodlums believed to be members of a cult group who started attacking members of the opposing camp one after another. It was in the process that Inya was killed after they had inflicted serious machete cuts on Mr Emmanuel Eluu and others.

Ifeanyi Obila's brother, Joel, corroborated the pastor while Titus Obila, a surveyor from the community, added that it was after Ajah discovered he (Titus) was among the plaintiffs in one of the suits against him that he decided to witch hunt him by erecting the illegal structure on the road to his compound.

"Since 2018, Hon Donatus (Ajah) had been doing all manners of wickedness to frustrate our efforts from obtaining justice until recently when he influenced some persons against others in the village which has cost the life of Mr Azubuike (Inya)", Obila, the surveyor said.

Joel claimed that the killers' target was his brother: "When these people came and could not find my elder brother, who I think was their target, they started attacking everyone there and people were running helter-skelter. That was when Azubuike Inya came from the village. He pleaded with them not to do such a thing, because it was not good. They attacked him and killed him with their machetes."

#### **Ex-commissioner denies involvement**

Ajah, however, denied the allegation of incitement or having a hand in the killing, claiming that he was not around when the incident happened. He also said that the accusation of misappropriation of community fund levelled against him was masterminded by mischievous persons who could not verify information before they would begin to rant.

Speaking to our correspondent on telephone, he said: "I was not at home during the incident but based on the report from eye witnesses, it was established that the deceased returned from Cross River to kill but unfortunately he got killed from his co-supporters. As I am talking to you now, some persons whom Mr Azubuike had injured before his demise are presently lying critically ill in the hospitals."

On the allegation of misappropriation of N22m, he told *Saturday Sun* that the owners being members of Azu Ukwu Ewa Welfare Union had withdrawn and made use of their money adding that there were resolutions and other documents to that effect.

Ajah claimed that he was not part of the people who negotiated the mast installation rather it was done by some persons that were at home then. He added that he was thereafter chosen by the villagers to represent them; an assignment he did wholeheartedly without attaching interest.

He further explained that the construction of the shops was a collective effort of all male adults who levied themselves to establish a source of income to the village but surprisingly Ifeanyi Obila allegedly used the position of his wife who was then vice chairman of Afikpo North LGA and demolished the property.

He reiterated that all the allegations against him were false and merely orchestrated to tarnish his good image which he had built for years. “It was the same Ifeanyi Obila, who started telling people that I had a hand in Azubuike’s death. I believe God is the giver and taker of life and will always disappoint Ifeanyi and his cohorts, who feel that they will only be satisfied if they hear that I am dead,” the former commissioner alleged.

#### **Police react**

At Afikpo, the Divisional Police Officer (DPO), Nwenyim Livinus told *Saturday Sun* that there was a killing in the area but that he lacked the mandate to speak to the press, hence, he referred this reporter to the State command headquarters, Abakaliki, where the incident was confirmed.

Police Public Relations Officer, Mrs Loveth Odah, who also confirmed the arrest of Ajah, added that the suspect was apprehended for his alleged involvement in Inya’s death. “Yes, he (Ajah) is in custody. We are still investigating the matter,” Odah stated.

Meanwhile, *Saturday Sun* findings indicate that the suspect was released after being detained for about 48 hours because the police said they could not continue keeping him in custody.

They could not arraign him since all the courts in the state were shut for about two weeks on the directive of Governor David Umahi due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The Police, however, have assured that the former commissioner would be charged for murder once the courts resume.