

# CRY FOR HELP

## Oruku communal crisis victims beg Enugu gov, IGP for intervention

From Magnus Eze, Enugu

**VICTIMS** of the intractable intra-communal crisis in Oruku, Nkanu East Local Government, Enugu State, have called for urgent intervention by the state government and the Inspector General of Police, Usman Alkali-Baba. One of them, Chukwukadibia Nnaji, who is the convener, Ije Udo Oruku, recounted the horrific human rights abuses and killings in the community, saying his house was razed on January 1, 2023, because he initiated a platform to engender lasting peace in the area:

"On Sunday, January 15, 2023, at least, eight lives were lost while 70 compounds were burnt since the crisis started in 2020." He added that women and children left in the community were currently at the mercy of armed groups.

The Oruku crisis started after government instituted a landmark peace deal which

ended over 30 years of armed conflicts between Oruku and Umuode communities.

While some members of the Oruku community accepted the deal, others rejected its terms, triggering a fresh wave of crisis. This led to the killing of the traditional ruler of the community, Igwe Emma Mbah and burning of his house on December 26, 2020.

Since then, there have been incessant killings and destruction in Oruku. In August 2022, gunmen reportedly shot dead Chief Livinus Nwatu, President General, Oruku Town Union.

Killers of Nwatu, a retired police officer, broke to his family the same day they had planned to bury, one Dennis Ike, a member of the community's security outfit, slain on June 6, 2022.

Daily Sun gathered that Ike's assailants laid ambush for him as he rode motorcycle at the time, shot him dead and set his body and motorbike ablaze before proceeding to torch houses of some persons in Oruku, that fate-



Destruction at Oruku community

ful day.

The unrest which greeted the killing of the traditional ruler prompted Governor Ifeanyi Ugwuanyi to institute a Judicial Commission of Inquiry to investigate Mbah's killing in 2021.

Testifying before the commission, the slain Town Union President, Nwatu, had alleged that "23 collaborators and sponsors were fuelling cultist activities in Oruku" to destroy lives and property.

He had urged the commission headed by Justice Harold Eya to look into the names listed in his memorandum as the masterminds of Oruku crisis and bring them to book. The panel has since submitted its findings to the govern-

ment but the report is yet to be made public.

Prior to the January 1, 2023, attack, at least 10 houses were reportedly set ablaze in the community on December 28, 2022, by suspected militants. Also, the hoodlums said to be armed with AK47 rifles allegedly shot one Sunday Orji, a native of the community on Christmas Day and inflicted severe injuries on his right arm.

Sources said some of the houses burnt belonged to the former local government chairman, Ejike Ani and his younger brother, Agozie.

Agozie: "Our crime was supporting Gov. Ifeanyi Ugwuanyi's peace deal on Oruku-Umuode crises."

Another indigene said: "Oruku has become a ghost town as the residents, including women and children, have deserted their homes to seek refuge in neighbouring communities for fear of being killed.

"The hoodlums, who have been operating unchallenged in the community since the state government's intervention that suspended the Oruku-Umuode communal war, are under the sponsorship of a powerful figure from Oruku who was opposed to the terms of reconciliation."

Nnaji gave graphic details of the latest onslaught: In December 2022, a woman, was tied to a tree and beaten mercilessly to the

point of death.

According to him, several women had been beaten and heavily injured because they were considered not to be in support of the armed groups' activities: "Elderly men, women and children are largely exposed to cruel human right violations, abuse, torture and inhuman maltreatment in the hands of the armed groups who operate unchecked by the security agencies in the state.

"Defenceless and vulnerable men, women and children have been made homeless and going through the physiological and traumatic effects of this crisis. People can't go to the farm, market or school. The living condition has been made worse for the vulnerable that can best be described as an emergency humanitarian situation.

"People's fundamental human rights have been violated without the security agencies to help protect lives and property as enshrined in Nigeria 1999 constitution.

"It's the constitutional right of the defenceless men, women and children that have not been attending school to be protected by the federal, state government and the security agencies."

He also called for the release and implementation of the 2021 panel report on the crisis to calm the situation and restore peace and order.

