



One of the buildings razed

Desolate, bleeding

■ 5 allegedly killed, 170 buildings razed in Imo security operations

From George Onyejiuwa, Owerri

SOME communities in Izombe, Oguta local governments, Imo State, are now desolate. Hundreds of residents have fled homes to safety. They accused the police of indiscriminate killings of innocent people and destruction of the houses in their operations.

Spokesman of the state Police Command, Henry Okoye, dismissed the allegation. He insisted the on going operations "are targeted at flushing out and

decimating suspected members of the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) and its affiliate, Eastern Security Network," in the oil producing community.

Natives alleged that at least five persons were killed in the last two weeks with more than 170 buildings set ablaze by the joint team of Military, Police, Department of State Security Services (DSS) and the government-sponsored Ebubeagu security outfit. They said Izombe and other adjoining communities of Agwa, Ejemkwuru, Awa, Akabuo, Mgbale and Ogbaku, all in Oguta LG, were "bleeding."

Security personnel were drafted by the state government to checkmate activities of bandits in the area. The situation adversely affected socio-economic and other activities as markets, schools and churches remained closed in Izombe for almost eight months.

An indigene of Amakpurudere Izombe told *Daily Sun* that five indigenes of his village were killed by the security operatives between June 7 and June 19, 2023. The source who, wished not to named listed those allegedly killed to include Benjamin Nwadirigbo, Nwabunigbo (aka Danvata), Obiezue

Ajaere, Izuka Izuaghanwa and Chike Izuaghanwa.

He added that some others were equally killed in other villages like Ndiawa, Ndioko, Orsu, Ugbale and Agwa, a neighbouring community to Izombe, but could not name them: "The combined team of Police, Ebubeagu and the military equally destroyed more than 170 buildings in various villages including over 45 houses in Amakpurudere Village alone."

The source equally alleged that the security forces looted people's properties: "The situation caused more than 90 per cent of the residents to flee the community. Many people abandoned their homes since Wednesday June 7, and Monday June 12, 2023, that the security operatives killed Benjamin and four others because of the level of fear they have instilled in the people with attendant destruction of buildings."

"As we speak, I no longer visit home just like many others in spite of the information that our family house was among those destroyed." He claimed that the houses burnt down in Amakpurudere alone belonged to Emmanuel Chukwudoruo, Romanus Obiagwu, Philip Okoronkwo, Ifeanyi Umehurike, Canice Ogbonna, Herbert Nwoke, Late Lucky Nwoke, Lambert Ekejiuba, Simeon Ekejiuba, Sabastine Okereke, Eneke Awaeze and Dom Iwuanyanwu.

Others were affected are Benjamin Ohanyirim, Jerome Ohanyirim, Late Marcelinus Ogbonna, Lawrence Ogbonna, Calistus Ononiwu, Chief Alex Madubuko,

Chief Oliver Ihejirika, Anthony Ihejirika, Alphomius Ogbonna among others.

He explained that the 170 buildings mentioned excluded those damaged last August in Ugbale, Ezama and other villages when the incessant attack began: "The figure does not include over 150 buildings the military burnt in Umuokwu, Ndioko and Umuorji in October, 2021 when there was clash with the youths as a result of toll collected from crude oil bunkers."

"In fact, if you visit Izombe, you will conclude that the Imo State Government really doesn't think good of Izombe, in spite of the viable economic status of the community before now."

He regretted that the community being one of the main oil-bearing areas and food basket of the state, was being destroyed like the "ancient Carthage Empire," while exploitation of crude oil was in progress.

He appealed to the media to draw the attention of Mr President, relevant international and national organisations like the Amnesty International and Rule of Law and Accountability Advocacy Centre (RULAAC), to help them out of the carnage going on in Izombe: "We need urgent help because our people are suffering and dying."

"Our people are going through excruciating humanitarian crisis and this is very unimaginable. Many people can no longer feed. Many no longer have their houses while hundreds were displayed as they look for shelters and foods in other communities."

Another community source alleged that most prominent people from Awa and Agwa communities including political office holders have fled the area: "I was lucky to be alive because I was kidnapped by some of these criminals on my way to my community in Izombe."

"Those criminals tied me up and took me to the forest. When their boss came to the forest and saw me, he ordered them to untie me that I was not the person they were looking for. They warned that I should be careful. That was how God saved me."

"Since that incident, I have not visited the village." He alleged that the security operatives rather than protect the innocent people were culpable in dehumanising them.

Dan Ochia from Amaudara village said Izombe communities repeatedly called on the government to dispatch secret agents to the area: "They will be surprised that those being killed have nothing to do with the matter."

Chief Paul Ibe who fled the community after his house was burnt said the state government was unconcerned at the early stage of the problem in spite of several appeals by their people: "The security situation deteriorated last August. This followed the invasion of the community by operatives of the state government-sponsored Ebubeagu during the community's Okorsha masquerade festival."

(Continued on www.sunnewsonline.com)

...Abia CP reads the riot act to criminals, hoodlums

COMMISSIONER of Police, Abia State, Mr Kenechukwu Onwumelie, has vowed to make the state uninhabitable for criminals: "It will be too hot for them."

Meanwhile, 16 suspected armed robbers, kidnappers and cultists were arrested. He said: "My vision for the state is to checkmate the criminals and run them underground. The command has mapped out strategies to deal with the hoodlums."

"According to the Acting Inspector General of Police, Mr Kayode Egbetokun, we should uphold justice fairness, protect human dignity and restore standard and values of the police force. Our

personnel will imbibe community policing and apply professionalism in discharging their duties."

"The Police Rapid Response Squad (RRS) operatives arrested 10 suspected armed robbers in Aba. Valuable items were recovered from the scene of crime. The operatives raided hideouts of the hoodlums in Umuahia and Ohafia."

"Some suspected members of Eiye Confraternity who were into armed robbery were also arrested. The suspects confessed to the crime. We had an encounter with some suspected kidnappers along the Aba/Port Harcourt Road. Their attempt to kidnap passengers was foiled."



Onwumelie