

Enugu communities deserted over possible herdsmen invasion

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People of Umuanee and Obagwa communities in Nkanu West Local Government Area of Enugu State yesterday fled their homes and took refuge at Ozalla Police Station over fear of reprisal by Fulani herdsmen.

Mr. Okwudili Chianeke, the president general of Umuanee Ozalla Town Union, one of the affected communities, told journalists that Fulani, accompanied by some men in military uniform, came to the community on Friday and claimed that their brother was killed by the people and threatened to carry out reprisal.

Chianeke also alleged that the police arrested Bonaventure Nwoye, the security officer of Ozalla Neighbourhood Watch, a vigilance group set up by the state government, on alleged involvement in the murder.

Meanwhile youths of the two communities yesterday blocked the Enugu-Port Harcourt Expressway at the popular Four Corners (Ozalla Junction) to demonstrate their anger over the occupation of their farms by Fulani herdsmen as well as arrest of the chief security officer. The blockade lasted for about an hour before they gave way following intervention by their leaders and security operatives.

The youth carried placards with various inscriptions such as: "Fulani, leave Ozalla," "They should release our chief security officer," "Fulani, stop destroying our farmlands," "We're now refugees in our land" and "Enugu State government come and rescue us." The traditional ruler of Umuanee community, HRH Crescent Okafor, expressed surprise over allegation that the body of a Fulani boy was found in their area.

He said that neither the police nor the Fulani reported the matter to him before Nwoye was arrested and threat of reprisal by the Fulani. Okafor said the problem started last year when some Fulani and their families moved in with six trucks and settled behind the community, a development they resisted and reported to government, which ensured that the Fulani vacated as they promised within three days. The monarch said that he was not aware that the Fulani went back to the area not to talk of the body of one of them being allegedly found in the area.