

# Roasted to death by warlords

It was supposed to be the happiest day of the family as they were celebrating the only undergraduate in the history of their entire family. But it turned out to be their saddest day. **UCHENNA INYA** reports on the tragic end of six children from same family and four of their neighbours, who were roasted to death by warlords

**I**f the six family members of John Nweke of Okperu Echara and four children of their neighbours had any premonition of their sudden death on April 6, they would not have attended the matriculation of one of them.

But the anger and tears on the face of an infant in the picture they took at the matriculation venue before they were killed, seemed as if she saw what happened to them and decided to show it openly but her siblings never knew until it manifested on their way home after the matriculation ceremony.

The people of Enyibichiri Echi-Alike in Ikwo Local Government Area of Ebonyi State and their neighbouring Enyigba, Abakaliki Local Government Area of the state have been at war for long over boundary matters.

The crisis has claimed many lives with properties worth millions of naira destroyed while efforts by previous administrations in the state to put an end to it proved abortive.

Last year, the crisis took a dangerous dimension when the two communities engaged in bloodletting, brigandage and destruction of valuable properties. About 15 persons were killed in the melee. Governor Dave Umahi, who was embittered by the killing and maiming, declared that the land has been taken over by the state government and ordered security agents to shoot at sight anyone found trespassing on the land as a way of ending the mayhem.

That was not to be, as 10 children were roasted to death when the warlords blocked the Alex Ekwueme Federal University Ndufu Alike road, attacked and killed 10 persons.

The six children and their four neighbours were roasted to death by warlords on their way home after attending the matriculation held by Ebonyi State University (EBSU) for newly admitted students of the school.

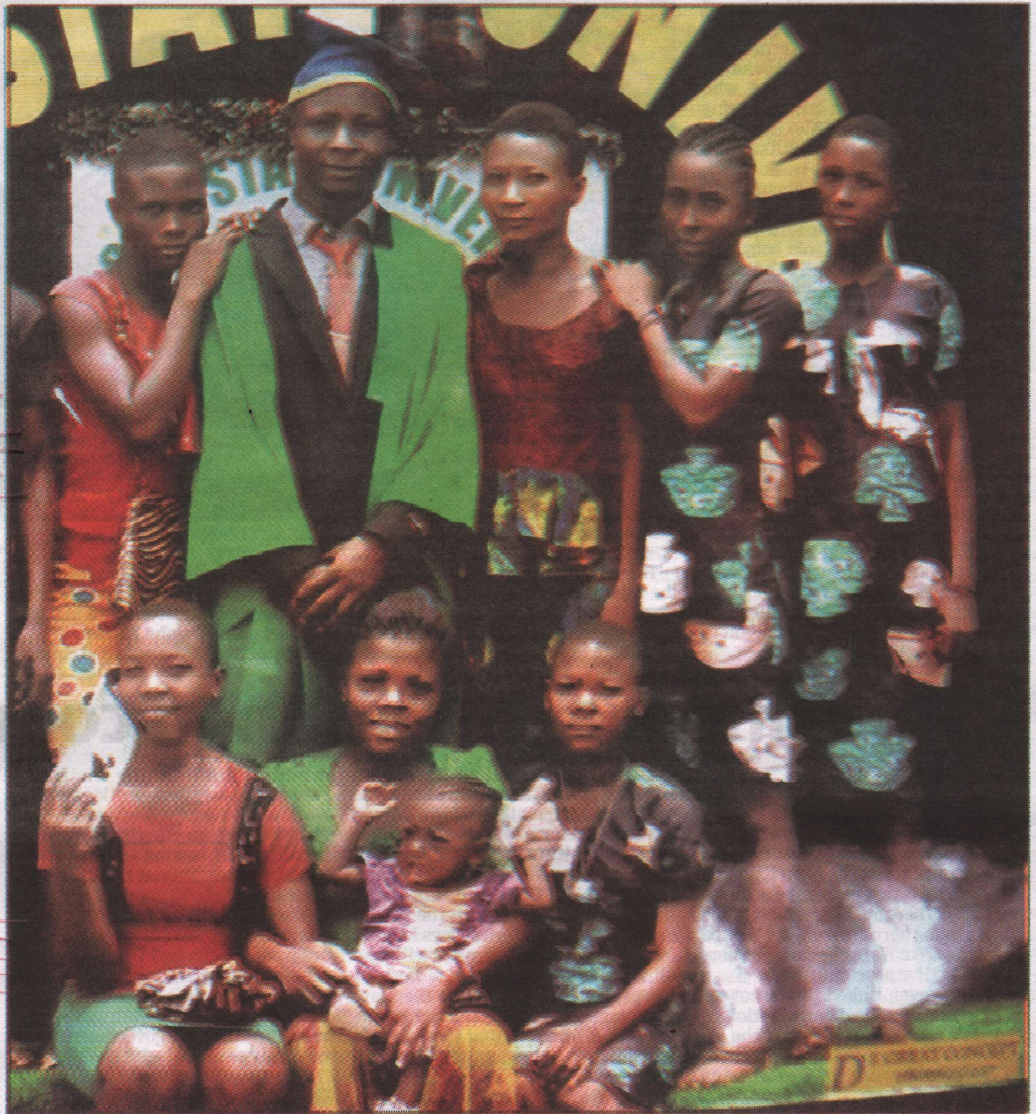
The warlords also shot and killed three persons, who were on motorcycle on that day. One of those shot was wife of a Police officer serving in the state but on assignment to Borno State to fight insurgency in the Northeast.

The state Police Public Relations Officer, DSP Loveth Odah, confirmed the incident. She said: "It is a long standing dispute between Ndiagu Alike community and Enyibichiri community that erupted on Saturday."

A vehicle was seen burning on the road allegedly set ablaze by warriors from one of the communities. The victims were coming from Abakaliki where they attended a matriculation of their son.

Five of them were from the same family, including a little baby and one is a neighbour who joined them. They were burnt to ashes beyond recogni-

## ● The Tragedy of six children, four neighbours



The six children and their neighbours roasted to death by the warlords

tion."

The spokesperson said the driver, on sighting the warlords, tried to speedily turn the car but in his haste and fear, dropped the car into a ditch. "The gunmen opened fire on the car and some bullets punctured the fuel tank and it caught fire killing the six occupants.

She added that, "three other persons were also attacked and two of them were killed. One of them, a woman was the wife of a police officer deployed to Borno State."

About a week after the killings, the state Police Command arrested three hired mercenaries in the crisis. Odah disclosed this to journalists last week during a press briefing.

"On April 12th, while policemen were on stop and search along Enugu/Abakaliki Expressway, they intercepted a bus with passengers. Upon search, three suspects were arrested. They are Obiajulu Emunama 'M', 40, an indigene of Anambra State; Peacemaker Nwadozie 'M', 33, an indigene of Enugu State and Lawrence Nwingbo 'M', 30, of Izzi Ishieke Ebonyi state.

"The suspects confessed to a crime and narrated how they were hired as war mercenaries to fight for Izzi and in return a cash sum of two million

naira (2,000,000) would be paid to them," she said.

Continuing, she said that the suspects stated further that a deposit of N80,000 was given to them and that the marks on their chest showed their readiness to prosecute the war.

Commissioner for Border Peace and Internal Security, Dr Kenneth Ugbala, said some occupants of other cars behind the burnt bus were also injured by stray bullets. "They are receiving treatment at the hospital in Abakaliki," he said.

He said government has deployed more security operatives to the area to restore normalcy.

"The Deputy Governor of the state, Kelechi Igwe will soon visit the area to ascertain the level of damage."

Angered by the killings, Umahi suspended chairmen of the two local government areas over the resurgence of the communal crisis. The affected chairmen included: Emmanuel Nwangele of Abakaliki and John Nnabo of Ikwo LGA. Umahi, who was on working vacation outside the country, cut short his vacation and returned to the state to attend to the crisis.

The governor, on arrival to the state, quickly summoned the stakeholders of

the warring local governments to emergency meeting and suspended them for their inability to end the crisis.

Dr Hyginus Nwokwu, Secretary to the State Government (SSG), told journalists after Umahi's meeting with the stakeholders that the suspension was with immediate effect.

"The governor is not happy that both chairmen did not demonstrate capacity to ensure security in both councils which they are constitutionally bound to protect.

"The governor also suspended all political office holders from communities in both councils—Enyibichiri, Noyo Echilaike from Ikwo and Edda, Enyigba communities from Abakaliki LGA.

"The suspension will lapse only when lasting peace returns to the areas as the suspended chairmen are directed to handover to their vice chairmen," he said.

Nwokwu added that civil servants from both councils, who directly or indirectly financed the perpetrators of the clashes were also suspended.

That would ensure that they are financially incapacitated to sponsor such

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