

One feared dead, as Ebonyi officials, traders clash



Published 10 hours ago on August 29, 2019
By



One person was yesterday feared dead when the Ebonyi State Internally Generated Revenue (IGR) task force clashed with some traders at Abakaliki-Abakpa Main Market

The market has been engulfed in leadership crisis. The Chairman of the market, Christopher Eze, was removed for alleged financial fraud with a committee set up by government to oversee the affairs of the market.

Trouble started yesterday when some government officials and the task force went to the market to seal up shops of traders who refused to pay their IGR when some of the defaulters (traders) revolted against the team, leading to the beating of a trader who allegedly died.

Angered by the trader's death, other traders rioted and were on the verge of vandalising shops of some the market leaders working with the government when policemen arrived the market and dispersed them.

It was learnt that the traders immediately mobilised and attacked the IGR team members and beat some of them up while others escaped.

During a visit to the market, policemen brutalised some traders and passers-by. They bundled some of them into their Hilux vans and took them to the police headquarters.

All the shops in the largest market in the state were shut following the incident.

A trader, who gave her name simply as Ngozi, alleged that the 'revenue collectors' were using the IGR collection as cover to close down the shops of some traders who took government to court over the leadership crisis in the market.

Ngozi said the traders had gone to court to challenge the removal of the market leadership before the expiration of their tenure and imposition of an interim leadership on them by government.

She said: "They came to the market and were taken to the shops of the traders that took them to court and they started closing their shops, accusing them of not paying IGR."

"One of the sons of one of the traders entered into altercation with them and in the process a fight broke out.

"As they were beating him, he fell on the ground and he hit his head on the ground and lost consciousness."

The state Police Public Relations Officer (PPRO), Loveth Odah, denied that anyone was killed in the incident.

She said one person sustained injury on the head and was rushed to the Federal Teaching Hospital Abakaliki for treatment.

The Commissioner for Internal Security, Stanley Emegha, said five shops were sealed for various reasons ranging from refusal to pay IGR to the shops being used for criminal activities in the market.

Okwuegbu, on his part, said about seven shops were sealed for not paying their taxes.

He denied knowledge of any fracas or death, adding that the exercise was peaceful.

"We sealed the shops and left peacefully. I am just hearing from you that someone died. Nothing like that happened while we were there," he added.

Okwuegbu denied that the exercise was used to victimise some traders opposed to government's action on the market leadership.

He said: "We served them notice to pay three times before going to seal their shops. If anyone says he or she has paid let them come and present their records and we will immediately open the shops."

On his part, the Special Assistant to Governor David Umahi on Market Development, Karian Emeka Ofoke, said the team in the market to go after tax and levies evaders.

He said: "We locked up their shops and left. Later, we heard there was trouble whereby we sent security agents to ensure there was no breakdown of law and order in the market. That is all I know. I don't even envisage that somebody died. I was there in the morning and I left without resistance."