

Outrage as soldiers raid Cross River community, kill 7, destroy several houses

•Our men didn't kill or rape women –Army

From **Judex Okoro**, Calabar

OUTRAGE has greeted a military raid of war-torn Nko community in Cross River State, resulting in the alleged killing of seven persons and destruction of several houses. The soldiers were dispatched from 105 Battalion in Efor, Ikom Local Government Area, to enforce peace between Nko in Yakurr and Oyadama in Obubra LGAs involved in a communal clash.

The two communities have been in an age-long land dispute, leading to internecine wars between brothers, even as previous peace moves initiated by the state government failed.

Trouble started again on Saturday, June 26, when Nko youths allegedly shot and wounded some soldiers on a peace mission and disappeared into the bush. In reprisal, the soldiers allegedly went berserk, raiding Nko community and destroying houses, including the palace of the village head of Nko, Obol Effiom Ayomobi, thus displacing thousands in the quest to fish out the gunmen that attacked the soldiers.

Piqued by the action of the youths, Cross River State Government ordered immediate dethronement and de-certification of the Obol Lapon of Nko, Obol Etim Ayomobi, in Yakurr, and the clan head of Oyadama, Ovarr Vincent Erena, in Obubra, over the shooting of the six officers by youths of Nko community.

The state government also sacked all village chiefs in Nko and Oyadama, even as it has taken over the disputed land until those behind the shooting of officers are produced or fished out.

A press release signed by the deputy chief



•Some of the houses allegedly destroyed by the military at Nko

press secretary to Governor Ben Ayade, Mr. Linus Obogo, said the dethronement and de-certification of the two monarchs was as a result of the intractable communal clashes, adding that "the ownership of the disputed land has been revoked and taken over by the state government for overriding public interest." Additionally, "government has ordered the sustenance of the army operation in Nko community until those behind the shooting of the six

military personnel are produced or fished out."

However, the military action has attracted wide condemnation from the State House of Assembly, leadership of Nko community and other stakeholders, who described the army approach as "unethical and unprofessional."

Decrying the wanton destruction of the community by a detachment of troops, Cross River State lawmakers unanimously called on the military to stop further destruction of lives and

properties in Nko, which allegedly left several houses burnt and seven persons dead.

The House, under "urgent matters of public interest," sponsored by the Speaker of the Assembly and member representing Yakurr II, Hon. Eteng Jonah Williams, further called on government to, as a matter of urgency, send relief materials to displaced victims who are taking refuge in the surrounding villages of Mkpani, Ekorri and Ugep.