

# Crime

Okey Maduforo

**T**he escalating insecurity in Anambra State is creating significant tension and fear among residents as a result of the senseless killings of innocent people across the state.

The recent killing was the four operative vigilante group members and one other person, while several others sustained degrees of injuries in the attack by the assailants.

It was gathered that the rise in violent attacks by armed groups has led to a pervasive sense of vulnerability, as those in the villages grapple with the loss of innocent lives and increased criminal activities on daily basis in the state.

Our correspondent also gathered that those who live outside the state capital, Akwa, claim they live in fear, prompting them to call for enhanced security measures for their communities, but they still remain anxious about their safety.

## Recent killing

In the early morning of November 18, four vigilante operatives were said to have been killed by gunmen who opened fire on them at Ukpo, Dunukofia Local Government Area of the state. While at Abatete Community in Idemili North Local Government Area of the state, the gunmen also stormed the community and started shooting indiscriminately which led to the death of one person in the area same day.

According to reports, the gunmen, suspected to be enforcing the Monday sit-at-home, were said to have arrived Abatete community at about 8:30 am and opened fire on some residents, before proceeding to the Ukpo Roundabout, where they also fired randomly at many people, including some members of the Anambra State Vigilante.

It was gathered that the attackers, also set ablaze some vehicles of the vigilante operatives ablaze, and killed at least four of the vigilante men, among other atrocities they committed before fleeing the scenes.

The dastardly incident was corroborated by some videos currently trending on social media, showing the corpses of one of the vigilante operatives lying in a pool of blood at the Ukpo Roundabout, while three were seen in a similar manner in Abatete.

One of the videos also showed the President General of Abatete community, Chimame Ezigbo, as he was being rushed to the hospital for urgent medical attention, after he was dangerously hit by a stray bullet during the attack.

Another member of the vigilante group was also hit by bullets and was rushed to the hospital for urgent medical attention.

## Governor's order

It was learnt that Governor Charles Soludo had two weeks ago ordered all markets in the state to open and not to obey the 'Sit At Home' order by the gunmen.

Our correspondent gathered that it was the order the traders at Ukpo complied with forcing the gunmen to storm their community and started shooting indiscriminately, leading to the death of four Anambra State Vigilante Operatives providing safety for the traders in the market.

Meanwhile, On Thursday October 17, the suspected gunmen also killed two policemen at Uruagu, Nnewi North Local Government Area of the state.

The policemen were said to be in the community to conduct investigations when they were attacked by the gunmen.

## How escalating insecurity creates fear in us –Anambra residents

...as 4 vigilantes killed, vehicle burnt



Vigilantes

A source in the community told our correspondent that the armed men opened fire on the policemen upon sighting them and threw an improvised explosive into their operational vehicle. Tragically, two of the policemen lost their lives, and their vehicle was burnt to ashes.

The source added that those of them that lives in the state, especially the villages live in fear and panic everyday. "We don't always know our fate whenever we are going out, except when God brings us back home safely. We are living in a serious environment in Anambra State.

"We are only coping because we have no other place called home than Anambra, the tension is so much. Aside from the state government vigilante operatives, many communities have also formed their own vigilante group to enhance security and protect them from attack from the gunmen who moved around the various communities to caused trouble.

"As a result of the escalating insecurity in the state, many residents now adopted more caution by avoiding night travels, and staying alert in their surroundings to mitigate risks associated with violence and kidnapping.

"We also rely on social ties by sharing information about threats and safety measures among our neighbours. These strategies have reflected in our community security driven approach by addressing the pervasive fear stemming from ongoing violence in the state."

## Three killed

Another resident of Enugu-Ukwu Community in Njikoka Local Government Area of the state was killed by the suspected gunmen and five others sustained injuries during the attack by the armed men.

The incident occurred on Monday, October 21, at the boundary between Enugu-Ukwu and Nawfia Community.

A source said someone called and invited some young men from Enugu-Ukwu to come inspect a land and on getting to the site the gunmen asked them to lie and face down.

According to one of the victims, Emeka Ike who succeeded in escaping from the barrel of the guns from gunmen that lasted thirty minutes. "I got a call from someone who asked me to follow him that he wanted to show me a land and I went there along with four other young men only for us to be told to lie down.

"I and others tried to know what was happening and they started shooting at us and the bullet hit me on my leg while three persons among us died on the spot and I tried to escape with my wound.

"It was later I got to know that we were lured to the land under the guise that they wanted to buy land, unfortunately, we were attacked by the assailants who also used machete to cut those that were already killed by the assailants."

A resident who spoke on condition of anonymity said the situation in Anambra and other South East states is getting out of hand.

He said majority of those who are in the villages have moved out for fear of their children being killed. While our children who are abroad and other parts of the country don't come home to see us, we are only left in the village alone. We are living in fear and panic everyday of our lives.

"We cannot go to farm anymore, or visit another family member in another village, because everyone of us is afraid of being killed or kidnapped by gunmen. The security agencies are trying their best, but they are overwhelmed as a result of the various security issues they are confronting. The present killing, the vigilante operatives were just in their operational vehicle parked when the gunmen opened fire on them and killed four.

"Those who didn't die are presently battling to survive at the hospital where they were rushed to for treatment and various others sustained injuries and even passersby too was hit by stray bullets. We need peace in Nigeria, I am praying to God everyday to restore peace back to our land in Anambra and Nigeria at large."

## Security expert

The Executive Director, Rule of law and Accountability Advocacy Centre (RULAAC), Mr. Okechukwu Nwaguma, said the recent killing of members of the vigilante group in Anambra State and the broader insecurity in the state is worrying.

He said government should step up actions to end the violence and insecurity. The government should work towards restoring peace, security, and stability in Anambra State, while addressing the underlying factors that contribute to violence and insecurity.

Nwaguma said the Anambra State government should increase the presence of security forces in affected areas, deploy rapid response units, and enhance intelligence-gathering to preempt attacks on vigilante



Anambra State Commissioner of Police Nnaghe Obono Itam

groups and residents.

"The government should also provide resources to local vigilante groups, ensuring they are trained, adequately equipped, and integrated into the broader security framework, enhancing their effectiveness and safety.

"Government should also foster collaboration between security agencies and local communities to build trust, encourage reporting of suspicious activities, and promote community-based security initiatives. Government should address the root causes of insecurity and implement socio-economic development programs to tackle poverty, unemployment, and disenfranchisement, which can contribute to violence and insecurity."

The Soludo led administration, he said, should ensure swift investigations into the killings, holding perpetrators accountable to restore public confidence in the security forces and the justice system.

"They should also launch campaigns to educate residents on safety practices, the role of vigilantes, and the importance of collaboration with law enforcement, with regards to Sit-at-home order in Southeast Nigeria, particularly Anambra State.

"Government should initiate open dialogue with community leaders, youth groups, and other stakeholders to address grievances, fostering a real sense of inclusion and understanding and encourage peaceful protests or advocacy rather than violent disruption, ensuring that citizens can express their concerns without resorting to harmful sit-at-home orders.

"They should ensure that law enforcement respects human rights and doesn't resort to violence, creating an environment where citizens feel safe and supported in their communities. The state government should encourage local governments to play a proactive role in addressing the issues that lead to unrest, giving citizens a stronger voice in local governance."

## Police

When contacted, the Anambra State Command Police Public Relations Officer (PPRO), SP Tochukwu Ikenga, said that the command was aware of the incident, and had deployed some operatives to the scene.

"The command is not relaxing on the issue of gunmen in the state and other security issues. We are going to tackle them headlong and restore peace to the various villages in Anambra State, that's assured."

TAIWO JIMOH

COORDINATOR

jimoh75@gmail.com

07064530927