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Nigeria: police accused of murdering mining protestors

28th February 2008

Under a fortnight ago, we posted on this website a statement from Nigeria which presaged a new minerals law, aimed at capturing more income from mining for the government - and presumably its people. See:

<http://www.minesandcommunities.org/Action/press1881.htm>

Last week, however, a Lagos newspaper reported that that several local people may have been murdered by police when they protested against alleged violation of a benefits-sharing agreement, made with an iron ore mining company.

Nigeria: Kogi - 20 Feared Killed in Police Reprisal Attack

Wole Ayodele, THISDAY (Lagos), Lokoja

28th February 2008

<http://allafrica.com/stories/200802280358.html>

In what may compare with Zaki Biam and Odi episodes, several people were feared killed yesterday when policemen drafted to maintain peace at Okene in Kogi Central went on a killing spree.

Several others were also maimed in a reprisal attack to avenge the killing of a riot policemen by unidentified youths in the area on Monday.

Unconfirmed reports put the number of the killed at 20 but a member of those state House of Assembly representing Adavi Constituency, Hon. Momoh Jimoh Anda, told THISDAY yesterday that he counted at least 15 dead bodies after the attack.

About 5,000 people are also said to have been rendered homeless while 65 residential houses and 150 stalls were set ablaze by the policemen who were allegedly avenging the killing of their colleague.

Trouble had started on Monday when youths in Adavi Local Government Area of the state attacked six trucks belonging to Global Infrastructure Holding Limited (GIHL) at Ogaminana area in protest against the concession of Itakpe Iron Ore Mining Company to the company.

The six trucks carrying iron-ore concentrates from the mining company to Port Harcourt were allegedly vandalised by the youths who accused the Federal Government of not taking care of their interest in the agreement reached with GIHL.

But they were said to have been accosted by some of the riot policemen drafted to maintain peace in the area, which had been a troubled spot for sometime.

When THISDAY visited the scene of the incident yesterday, the stench of the corpses still filled the air, though some dead bodies were said to have been evacuated.

The entire place was littered with the carcass of some domestic animals.

Some of the stalls set ablaze at Ogaminana main market were still burning.

At Uruvoba area alone, no fewer than 40 houses were set ablaze while several other people

were injured and rendered homeless.

The Chairman of Ogaminana Traders Union, Mallam Salihu Jimoh, who spoke with THISDAY, disclosed that the riot policemen stormed the area in the night of Tuesday after a policeman was found dead and was believed to have been killed by the youths that attacked the trucks carrying the concentrates.

He lamented the killing and burning of houses and shops of those he referred to as innocent people who had nothing to do with the attack on the policeman.

Conducting THISDAY round the market, which was completely razed down, Jimoh said goods worth over N15 million were destroyed.

Also, Hon. Anda, who raised the matter on the floor of the House, condemned the action of the policemen and called for urgent action to rehabilitate the displaced persons as well as compensate the victims whom he described as innocent people.

A community leader in the area, Alhaji Ahmed Adoke, told THISDAY that the youths were embittered and protested the failure of GIHL to employ indigenes of the local government in Itakpe but were attacked by policemen hired by the company to effect the release of the trucks held hostage by the youths.

He said this led to the killing of a yet-to- be identified person and a policeman adding that the incident had further increased the tension in the area.

Efforts to reach the state Commissioner of Police, Mr. Ibe Aghanya, was unsuccessful as at the time of filing the report.

Also, several calls made to the command Public Relations Officer's phone were unanswered.

Meanwhile, the police have identified seven prominent members of the All Nigeria Peoples Party (ANPP) as the masterminds of the spate of armed robberies, arson and killings in Kogi Central Senatorial District late last year.

The suspects are Sen. Salami Ohiare, Sen. Saslihu Olize, Mr Sule Kokori, Mr. Abdulkreem Salihu, Mr Abdulmumuni Okara, Alhaji Abubakar Inihaya and Alhaji Sidi Bello.

The Inspector-General of Police, Mr. Mike Okiro, made the allegation in an affidavit filed before a Federal High Court in Abuja in a suit filed by the suspects challenging their detention.

In the affidavit deposed to by a police officer, Mr. Boman Zachariah, on behalf of the IG, the police said that sequel to the breach of peace in the district, they had received several petitions against the suspects.

Okiro said that as a result of the petitions, he set up a special homicide detectives squad to investigate the allegations.

"On Aug. 10, 2007 the detectives forwarded a progress report on the investigations, detailing those indicted, who included the applicants," he said in the affidavit.

The IG further said that when the suspects suspected that the detectives had stumbled on credible evidence to charge them to court, they rushed to a FCT High Court to obtain an ex-parte order to prevent their prosecution.

Okiro said that after securing the ex-parte order on Aug. 7, 2007, the applicants filed the suit before the federal high court to stop their prosecution.

"Criminal charges will be laid against the applicants and other persons indicted in the police investigations report, as soon as the several suits instituted by the applicants are determined," he said.

"Innocent lives were lost and properties, worth millions of naira, were also lost during the mayhem and the police are determined to bring the culprits to book, no matter how well-placed they are, to serve as deterrent to others," he added.

He, however, denied the allegation in the suit that the suspects were tortured and subjected to

inhuman treatment in the course of investigations.

A correspondent of the News Agency of Nigeria (NAN) reported that the suspects had filed a suit at the court challenging their detention by the police and seeking a declarative relief against the IG.

The case has been adjourned till March 16 by the presiding judge, Justice Babs Kuewumi.