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2 Feared Dead in Renewed Communal Crisis

From Christopher Isiguzo in Abakaliki, 04.30.2009

The lingering communal crisis which since last year pitched the people of Ezillo and Ezza living in Ezillo, all in Ishielu Local Government Area of Ebonyi State reverberated Tuesday with the killing of two persons while three others were feared missing.

Informed sources told newsmen that the renewed hostilities broke out weekend, as sporadic gunshots rent the air at the disputed lands in the area even as serious tension enveloped the area.

The military personnel deployed to the area on Monday paraded four persons said to have been arrested allegedly in possession of four AK47 rifles together with a soldier who was also alleged to be a co-conspirator. All the suspects were brought to the Cabinet Office, Government House, Abakaliki.

Though details of the situation in the war-torn community were still sketchy as at press time, sources told THISDAY that those arrested had made useful statements, as they were said to have alleged that a serving commissioner in the state was one of their major financiers.

The Commander of the security taskforce in the area, Operation MESSA, Lieutenant. Saturday Fasunda, could not speak to the press on allegation of involvement of some bad eggs who were part of the military peace keeping force.

But the commander had a brush with a journalist working for a local tabloid who wanted to take a picture of the paraded suspects including the soldier as he confiscated his digital camera and removed the memory card.

The Secretary to the State Government, Chief Fidelis Mbam, received the reports and asked the suspects few questions before they were taken away.

It would be recalled that more than forty persons were killed and property worth millions of naira destroyed since the communal war broke out on May 10, 2008. Also, more than 16 AK47 rifles and live cartridges and ammunitions have been recovered by the police and the military since the war began.

Following the degeneration of the crisis, Governor Martin Elechi had ordered that the Police and other law enforcement agents working in the area be withdrawn and replaced by the military but the crisis has continued intermittently.

Recently when the former General Officer Commanding the 82 Division of Nigerian Army, Enugu, Major Gen. Isa Mohammed, visited Governor Elechi, one of the complaints laid before him by the governor was the escape of 23 militants under the army's custody.

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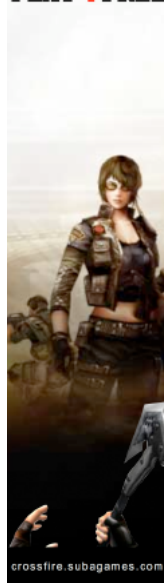
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