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ThisDay question

Ebonyi Crisis: Death Toll Rises to 12, Soldier Missing

From Christopher Isiguzo in Abakaliki, 07.28.2009

With a military man on peace keeping operation now declared missing, death toll in the renewed bloody clash between the people of Ezillo and Ezza-Ezillo in Ishielu Local Government area of Ebonyi State has risen to 12.

While sources close to one of the warring sides claimed the loss of only three persons, two men from Ezzangbo, a community close to the war-torn communities and an old man from Ezillo, were killed with the head of the two young men severed from their body. Additional information also had it that soldiers drafted to maintain peace and security in the area engaged one of the warring sides who was alleged to have hired mercenaries from Benue and Niger Delta in a gun duel, which resulted in the death of seven of the mercenaries, and disappearance of one of the military men.

The renewed violence has further made peace, which was gradually returning to the community after over one year of hostilities to take flight, as villagers who took to their heels were yet to return as at the time of filing this report. The crisis has continued to affect vehicular movement along the ever busy Enugu-Abakaliki expressway as the road was intermittently blocked for several hours from either of the two directions. Though no official statement has emerged on the missing soldier, THISDAY gathered that about four trucks of soldiers were yesterday deployed to the warring community, apparently a search for the missing soldier.

War broke out between the two communities on May 10, 2008, at a local market over ownership of a portion of land where an Ezillo man wanted to construct a phone booth. The war triggered off age-long rivalry over which of the two clans is an indigene or settler. So far, the conflict had claimed over 40 persons, while properties running into several millions of naira had been destroyed.

Reacting to the development, Police Public Relations Officer, Chris Anyanwu, said the state police command was determined to bring the situation under control, but refused to give the number of casualties.

"We are getting the situation under control. But on the issue of casualties, I can't say for now, because I'm out of town, but we are in charge of the situation," he said.

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