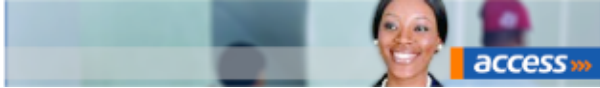


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Renewed Communal Clashes Claim 12 in Benue

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Governor Gabriel Suswan

By George Okoh

Twelve people were feared killed, while about 20,000 others were reportedly displaced in a communal clash between inhabitants of Ojantele and Ijegwu communities in Otukpo and Obi Local Government Areas of Benue State.

It was also gathered that properties worth several millions of naira were destroyed

during the clash.

An eyewitness account said fighting broke out between the bordering communities late Tuesday, following renewed dispute over a piece of land being claimed by both community.

Another witness account said houses, huts and economic trees were also destroyed as a result of the crises.

It was also gathered that among those who lost loved ones in the conflict was the state Commissioner for Finance, Mr. Omadachi Oklobia, whose cousins were reportedly killed in the clash.

Reacting to the clash at its sitting Wednesday, the state House of Assembly, in a motion called on the state Commissioner of Police, Mr. Christopher Katso, to dispatch officers and men to the crisis zone in order to restore law and order in the communities.

Raising an issue of urgent importance at the floor of the Assembly, Hon. Baba Ode, representing Otukpo/Akpa constituency, told the Assembly that he received a phone call from an anonymous caller intimating him that fighting had erupted between his constituents and the neighbouring Ijegwu community in Obi local government area.

Ode said he further received text messages from relations, who informed him of the escalation of the crisis leading to the death of his close associates and friends adding that as at Tuesday night, not less than six deaths had been recorded in the crisis.

The lawmaker lamented that the brotherly communities had in the last 10 years intermittently engaged each other in fracas, despite efforts to find lasting solution to the dispute.

He said: "The problem we have in this country is that whenever there is a crisis anywhere and peace is restored, everyone goes home with no efforts put in to ensure that permanent peace is restore in the affected area. That is exactly the situation we have found ourselves in this particular case."

The lawmaker urged the Assembly to compel the Surveyor General of the state to carry out a proper demarcation of the boundaries of the affected communities as remedy to the dispute.

In his reaction, Hon. Nick Eworo representing Obi constituency, called on the state government to dust up the report of the panel of enquiry set up in 1996 to investigate the crisis with a view to finding lasting solution to the crisis.

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