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Two Feared Dead As Shootout Rocks Calabar Prison

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Bassey Inyang in Calabar

At least two persons were feared killed following what officials of the Nigeria Prisons Service described as an attempted jailbreak that occurred Friday morning at the Federal Prison, Afokang, Calabar South, Cross River State.

Aside from those believed to have lost their lives in the shootout that characterised the incident, a number of people have been confirmed to have sustained serious injuries and are receiving treatment in undisclosed medical facilities in Calabar.

It was gathered that the intensity of the gun duel caused panic among residents of Afokang, Iman and Jebbs neighbourhood who fled into different directions for safety.

The fence of the prison at the Afokang was broken and a large hole created.

Though it is suspected that two prison inmates may have escaped from the punctured prison wall in the confusion that followed the shoot out, the prison authorities said no inmate escaped.

Eye witnesses, among them residents and shop operators in the area said they heard gunshots at about 10.00 am behind the prison from the area close to the river and when the shooting became intensified, they had to scamper for safety.

One of the eye witnesses who gave his name simply as Okon said: "I was in my shop when I started hearing very loud sound and when I rushed out I saw people wearing army uniforms with guns and the prison people shooting, so I ran and left my shop so that bullet will not come and get me."

Another resident of the community where the prisons is located, Ndabo Dominic Etim told journalists that, "We have been living in fear in the area for some time now, with reports that militants are camping in the nearby creeks and suddenly today around 11.am we heard a loud sound like a dynamite and subsequently several gun shots sporadically."

Though, the incident has been blamed on an attempted jail break, a prison insider who pleaded not to be mentioned said "about seventeen inmates made up of hardened criminals and militants were brought in about two weeks back, and since then there had been tension in the prisons before the incident that just happened. Even after the attempt was foiled, two hours after, while taking stock we were able to find a "missing" inmate and one ruffle in the ceiling of one of the prisons buildings."

Giving the official version of what transpired at the prison, the Prison Comptroller in charge of Cross River, Clement Udosen stated: "By 11 o'clock in the morning, I was in my office in the headquarters, the DC in charge of this prison called me that there was serious problem in the

yard, so I came and the whole place was filled with people with rifles; people who had come here to help us, the soldiers, police, civil defence, secret service and others”.

Explaining what had happened concerning the incident, Udosen said, “When they went in the yard to bath, two cells of about 70 each in each cell organised themselves and overpowered the prison staff and rushed to the where we have the armoury and seized the rifles there and went back firing at the staff. In that confusion they broke other cells and the whole yard was filled with inmates.” They carried what they could get to break the fence”.

In stating that none of the prisons inmates escaped, Udosen said: “Luckily for now they have all been rounded up and nobody has escaped. A lot of people have been injured and one staff had been rushed to the hospital. Right now the doctors with his team are treating those injured”.

However, he declined comments on the number of people that died as a result of the shootout in the prison, saying “On casualties (deaths), it is the doctor that would ascertain that because he is treating them.

“Most of those injured are the inmates. Three of our staff were wounded and one rushed to the hospital”.

He insisted that there was no external attack on the prison and as such no inmate escaped.

“There was no external invasion. It was an attempted jail break and luckily nobody escaped. The other security agencies helped us especially the 13th Brigade of the Nigerian Army because they stationed 10 soldiers here, morning and night and these are the ones that really helped us. They encircled the perimeter fence, as they (inmates) tried to come out of the hole, the soldiers were there and they could not come out”.

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