

In Search of Cultists, Police Shoot Three in Bayelsa

October 24, 2016

By Emmanuel Addeh in Yenagoa

On a day that the 17-year-old Innocent Kokorifa, a teenager killed by the police in Bayelsa State was being buried, another team from the state Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) last Saturday shot three persons in the Ekeki area of Yenagoa, the state capital.

While two of the victims, including five-year old Godsgift Odoku, have already died from the bullet wounds, doctors at the Federal Medical Centre, Yenagoa were battling to save the third as at yesterday evening.

The cops were ostensibly on a raid on cult gangs engaged in violent battles along the Ekeki Community when shots fired by them hit the three unsuspecting victims who were around the area at the time.

Residents of the area said the police who were responding to a distress call on the cult-related violence in the area, however, could not arrest any of the suspects who all fled on sighting the security operatives.

The incident which occurred late Saturday, was said to have thrown the residents of Ekeki and adjoining streets into panic as loud gun exchanges rang throughout the encounter in which a 30-year-old man identified as Inyang was also killed.

"The cult boys came into Ekeki community at about 2p.m. to bury one of their gang members. They were in a bad mood and went to Yenezue-Epie. But the SARS team chased them away.

"But they later regrouped at Ekeki community and saw two girls entering the area to visit their boyfriends and they collected their mobile phones.

"While the girls ran away, their boyfriends called the Police. One of the girls later came back with some men of SARS and while pursuing the cultists to the waterside, they released gun shots and it missed their target and killed two innocent people."

The SARS team immediately left the scene after confirming that their shots killed some innocent persons, it was learnt.

But in a statement yesterday, the police admitted that their men actually fired the shots, but said one person died immediately at the hospital, while the other two were still being treated.

The state police command noted that the officer who fired the particular shot that hit the three persons was currently in detention.

"On October 22, 2016, at about 1730hours, policemen from the Special Anti-Robbery Squad, responded to a distress call of a cult attack at Ekeki village, Yenagoa. The policemen were ambushed by the cultists.

"Consequently, a police sergeant fired, the bullet ricocheted, and injured three persons who were unfortunately not among the cultists.

"The victims were rushed to the Federal Medical Centre, Yenagoa, for treatment and one of them later died. The sergeant who fired has been detained. Investigation is ongoing," the release signed by Asinim Butswat, the police command spokesman in the state, noted.

Meanwhile, the Bayelsa State chapter of the Civil Liberties Organisation (CLO) led by Chief Nengi James, in a statement called on the Inspector General of Police (IG), Mr. Suleiman Abba, to set up a special probe panel into the rising spate of police killings in the state.

"We condemn the increasing rate of police killings in the state and call on the IG to immediately probe the killings of the citizens and the indiscriminate arrest and extortion of huge amounts of money from the citizenry under the guise of bail," the CLO said.

Meanwhile, Kokorifa, the teenager allegedly shot and killed by the police in Bayelsa two months ago, was on Saturday interred amid tears at the Ebebelibiri Cemetery, Yenagoa, after an autopsy was conducted.

Innocent, first of five children of Mr. Daniel Kokorifa, an official of the Federal Road Safety Corps (FRSC), was shot dead by the Anti-Vice/Anti-Kidnapping team along Air Force Road in Yenagoa, on August 18, 2016.

He was on an errand for his mother, Pere Kokorifa, when he was allegedly killed by the police about 11a.m. on that day, but the cops said he was killed in a shootout, a claim disputed by civil society groups and parents of the deceased.