

# One Dies, Scores Injured as Customs, Smugglers Clash in Ogun

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By Kayode Fasua

A fierce battle between a patrol team of the Nigerian Customs Service (NCS) and smugglers at the Imasayi border town of Yewa North Local Government Area of Ogun State at the weekend, left one mobile policeman dead, while scores of others sustained varying degrees of injuries.

The slain policeman, who was attached to the National Border Drill Patrol to complement the patrol team of the NCS, was killed in a battle that lasted about 30 minutes.

Two members of the smuggling syndicate also reportedly sustained bullet wounds in the head and neck during the attack launched against the Customs-led task force code-named, "Operation National Border Drill".

THISDAY gathered that the joint task force, comprising personnel from the Military, Police, Customs, Immigration and the Directorate of State Services (DSS), had stormed a suspected warehouse used by the smugglers, in an attempt to evacuate bags of rice already stockpiled there, but were resisted by the smugglers.

In the ensuing clash, the joint taskforce had retreated, having sensed dangers, but a mobile policeman whose identity could not be ascertained at the time of filing this report, was reportedly overpowered and shot with own rifle by the irate smugglers.

Many sources who spoke with THISDAY yesterday at scene of the incident in Imasayi, said a reinforcement of the Customs' task force later returned to the community hours after the incident, in what was meant to be a reprisal, but they ended up vandalising about 25 vehicles and burning two motorcycles.

The sources added that residents of the community had fled their homes in panic and run into adjourning bushes, while the hostility lasted.

Confirming the incident, the Customs Public Relations Officer (CPRO) for Ogun 1 Area Command, Mr. Abdullahi Maiwada, in a terse statement, said, "Operatives of the National Border drill went on routine anti-smuggling operation and had an encounter with some suspected smugglers on Saturday 14/03/2020".

"In the melee that ensued, one of the operatives was brutally murdered by some unscrupulous elements. "However, investigation is ongoing and the details shall be communicated as soon as practically possible".

Meanwhile, the state governor, Prince Dapo Abiodun, has appealed to the security operatives drafted to Imasayi over the incident to exercise restraint, particularly in the use of lethal arms against the natives.

A statement issued yesterday afternoon in Abeokuta, the state capital by the Chief Press Secretary to the governor, Mr. Kunle Somorin, said talks were ongoing towards apprehending the suspects who unleashed mayhem on the security operatives that resulted in the death of the mobile policeman.

Disclosing that a serious manhunt had been launched on the suspects who also made away with the slain officer's weapon, Abiodun further hinted that the manhunt had, as at yesterday (Sunday) morning, yielded positive results with the arrest of some suspects and the recovery of the slain officer's stolen rifle.

"The suspects already arrested in connection with this criminal act are giving useful information that would lead to the arrest of the main suspect. Investigation will continue until the murder suspect and other culpable persons are apprehended," the statement concluded.

While commiserating with families of the slain policeman, Abiodun also called on the law-abiding residents of Imasayi community to go about their usual activities without any fear of molestation.

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