

4 feared dead, 60 injured, several others missing in Ebonyi clash

By Tony Edike

A BAKALIKI —FOUR persons including two policemen were killed while about 60 others sustained injuries in a violent clash between protesting villagers and the police at Onicha Igboeze in Onicha Local Government Area of Ebonyi state at the weekend.

Several properties including the houses of the State Deputy Governor, Prof. Chigozie Ogbu and the Chairman of the State Council of Traditional Rulers, Ezeogo Dr Agom Eze were razed in the incident which started since Friday and was still raging by press time yesterday.

Reports said hundreds of villagers including youths, women and the aged had embarked on a peaceful demonstration against the

Ebonyi State Government's alleged marginalization and neglect of their community in the provision of social amenities.

But as the demonstration was in progress, *Vanguard* learnt that anti-riot policemen drafted from the state capital, apparently in an attempt to dislodge them, reportedly opened fire at the demonstrators without finding out the reason for their protest.

An eyewitness, Mr. Ejike Ivo, who is also a community leader, said the protesters who were carrying on their activities in a peaceful manner just to show their grievances against the action of the government, were attacked by the policemen who were heavily armed as if they were heading for "war". "The police started shooting

sporadically at us just like that. We were not armed except with leaves and shrubs to attract attention. They shot many of our boys and wounded many and we saw the dead lying around," he narrated to reporters.

Giving reasons for the demonstration, Ejike said for almost eight years of democracy in the state, the Dr. Sam Egwu administration could not provide amenities that would alleviate the plight of the people of the community, adding that the community can not boast of motorable roads, potable water, electricity, functional hospital or even GSM access lines. He further said that most of the times farm lands belonging to women are destroyed by the government under the guise of implementing projects which were usually abandoned.

Disturbed by the neglect of

the state government in spite of the appointments of some sons of the community into prominent positions, the villagers went on rampage destroying houses and properties belonging to officials of the government whom they accused of misrepresenting their people.

Apart from the state deputy governor and the Chairman of the state council of traditional rulers who suffered major losses, others whose properties were either vandalized or razed during the incident, were a member of the State House of Assembly from the area, Mr. Uzor Chigbo; Special Adviser to the governor on Political Matters, Mr. Onwe John Onu and the Vice-Chairman, Onicha Local government council, Chief Eze Nwankwo among others.

ed with the turnout for voters' registration?