

5 feared dead, others injured as task force ejects traders

By Evelyn Usman

LAGOS — AT least five persons were, yesterday, feared dead and scores of others injured following the forceful ejection of traders at Freedom Auto Parts market located on the Apapa/Oshodi expressway by a task force team of the state government.

The task force team which had earlier in the week carried out demolition of the market, stormed the site yesterday in continuation of the exercise, only to meet stiff resistance from aggrieved traders.

Consequently, the task force members which reportedly comprised mobile policemen numbering over fifty and heavily armed youths in plain clothes, allegedly descended on the traders, as tear-gas canisters were released and sporadic shots fired.

The bonfire allegedly set by the team, spread to a mechanic's workshop in the complex and burnt about three vehicles which were under repair.

The fracas which lasted for several hours, caused a heavy traffic jam which

stretched from Sanya bus-stop up to Tin-Can Island. Stranded commuters had to trek long distances before they could board buses to their respective destinations.

When *Saturday Vanguard* visited the market, the confused traders were seen packing their wares out of what used to be a haven for business activities, while about 100 demolished shops were counted and goods estimated at N25 million destroyed.

The traders, majority of whom were Igbos, lamented that they were not only being marginalised but were being persecuted and treated like aliens in a country where they constitute the majority.

Narrating how it all began, chairman of Freedom Market Association, Elder Cyril Nkwazema said, "It all started on Tuesday about 1.30p.m.. While we were going about our lawful business, we saw caterpillars numbering about five with fifty policemen and hoodlums with axes, sledge hammers and host of others, who ordered that we move our things out because they have come for the demolition of the structures.

"There was no prior notice. We came here on lease from our landlord, Mr Dele Afolabi who got the lease from one Mathew Daniels' family. We got this lease hold for ten years and nobody has the

right to eject us from here when we had barely spent just four and half years.

"To our surprise, when we reported the matter to the concerned office, we were made to understand that this place has been bought to be used as a container terminal. Only three weeks ago, we made an up-front payment of N4.6 million to our landlord. So what happened to the money we paid? What happens to our goods? Where do you expect us to go from here?" he asked.

Elder Nkwazema who said some of the traders were apprehended and taken away by the mobile policemen that came with the task force, expressed dismay at the manner they were being treated and threatened that the association would use all within its power to handle the matter legally.

Traders whose shops were demolished and their goods destroyed were seen discussing in groups. One of them whose mouth was bleeding as a result of injury he claimed was inflicted on him by one of the mobile policemen, wondered why one would be treated like a nobody in a country one called his own.

The traders therefore, called on governor Asiwaju Bola Ahmed Tinubu to use his good office to address the situation, by at least allocating an alternative place for them.

CHANGE OF NAME

AJAYI — I, formerly known and addressed as Miss Funmilayo Juliana Ajayi, now wish to be known and addressed as Mrs Funmilayo Juliana Olawuyi. All former documents remain valid. General Public please take note.