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## 20 feared killed in A'Ibom, C'River boundary dispute

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### *Mudiaga Affe, Calabar and Etim Ekpimah, Uyo*

Many people have been feared killed in a boundary dispute between the people of Oku Iboku in Itu Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State and the people of Ikot Offiong in Odukpani LGA in Cross River State again.

It was learnt that the clash between the two communities, which started Friday night, was like a war as light and heavy weapons were used by both sides. An unconfirmed report said over 20 persons were killed.

Southern City News gathered that the highest number of casualties were from Ikot Offiong as Oku Iboku youths ambushed them in the attack, and chased them to the neighbouring Odukpani community.

Travelers along the Calabar-Itu Highway were said to have been held for hours on Saturday until the arrival of soldiers, who chased the belligerent youths away to make way for smooth movement of motorists and commuters.

A source, who did not want his name in print, said the attack, about three times since December 2016, might have been sponsored by some faceless individuals.

Meanwhile, the people of Ikot-Offiong community in Odukpani Local Government Area of Cross River State on Sunday called on the Chief of Army Staff, Lt.-Gen. Tukur Buratai and the Inspector General of Police, Mr. Ibrahim Idris to investigate the activities of the soldiers and policemen posted to the area to foster peace.

Several persons have been killed in that last one month and property worth millions of naira destroyed following renewed clash over the disputed land between the people of Oku-Iboku in Itu Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State and their Ikot-Offiong neighbours in Odukpani Local Government Area of Cross River State.

In a 'Save Our Soul' letter which was signed on behalf of the Ikot-Offiong people by Chief Etim Bassey-Offiong and made available to Southern City News, the troubled community wants Buratai and Idris to investigate the activities of personnel deployed in the Itu end of the bridge closer to Ibawa Police Division in Akwa Ibom State.

The letter read in part, "The people of Oku-Iboku on January 16, 2017, crossed the bridge and attacked our people with dangerous weapons, killing some of us. On January 19, the Oku Iboku people caught one Bassey Ekpo from Eteheten village, who was returning from Port-Harcourt and killed him at Ayadeghe Bridge in the presence of the soldiers.

"On Saturday, February 11, 2017, the Oku-Iboku people with the aid of soldiers crossed the Calabar-Itu Bridge to Cross River to attack our people. Consequent upon the renewed hostility by the Oku-Iboku people, the Nigerian Army and the police have deployed their operatives to the warring area to protect the people and prevent the attack."

But reacting to the claims, the Public Relations Officer of the Nigerian Army, 13 Brigade in Calabar, Capt. Kayode Owolabi, denied the allegation, insisting that the Army was on

“As I speak with you now, we just left the dispute area where our men are solidly on the ground. Our aim is to restore peace and not to take side with any community,”Owolabi said.

Also, the State Police Public Relations Officer, Irene Ugbo, said the allegation was false, adding that efforts were on to ensure that critical stakeholders met to resolve the lingering crisis in the next few days.

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