

18 killed, 3,000 rendered homeless in C-River communal conflict

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By Emma Una

CALABAR—The raging conflict between the people of Wanikade and their Wanihem neighbours in Yala Local Government Area of Cross River State has claimed over 18 lives and left more than 3,000 people homeless.

The conflict which has raged from Wednesday last week, is due to squabbles over a piece of farmland situated in the boundary between the two sister communities and has left five villages on both sides razed and several farms destroyed

Chief Obok Okem, a traditional ruler in the area told Vanguard that a man from Utolo, a village in Wanikade community, cleared a portion of land thought to be his own but one of his Wanihem neighbours said the land belonged to him and went ahead to cultivate the land cleared by the Wanikade man. This led to an altercation between the two and from there youths from both communities got involved.

“The youths from Wanikade levelled the heaps dug by Wanihem people on the piece of land cleared by the Wanikade man and from there the youths from both sides began a grandstanding which eventually led to a fight,” he said.

Chief Okem said that from the exchange of blows the youths started throwing stones at one another which degenerated to the use of guns and machetes and after several days of fighting, many people were killed and over 200 houses in both communities set ablaze.

He said that efforts by elders of both sides to stop the youths were fruitless until a full scale conflict ensued leading to killings and burning of houses on both sides.

“Over five villages on both sides have been burned with property worth millions of naira lost in the process thereby rendering over 3,000 people homeless,” he said.

Another source from the area, James Onah, said the fighting raged until Friday, adding, “Soldiers have been able to stop the fight for now after the police could not do so but so much destruction had been inflicted on both villages.”

Mr Jude Ngaji, the state Security Adviser said soldiers drafted from the Brigadier Ally cantonment in Ogoja dispatched to the area had halted hostilities.