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Fresh anxiety in Ugborodo oil community: Gangsters establish militant camps, terrorize residents

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By Emma Amaize, Regional Editor, South-South and Egufe Yafugborhi

WHEN the Police declared wanted notable indigenes of Ugborodo, an Itsekiri oil community in Warri South-West Local Government Area, Delta State, over the August 23 ambush on the Warri waterways of the Chairman of the Ugborodo Community Management Committee, UCMC, Chief Austin Oborogbeyi and his members, many thought that peace would soon return to the creek neighborhood.

Protracted power struggle





Gov. Okowa

The unfortunate incident which claimed the lives of Pa Benson Okoturo and Samuel Mayomi was a case of brothers fighting and killing themselves over who controls power in the community. A community source, who spoke to Saturday Vanguard, said the violence was sparked by an attempt by some factional leaders to stop the Chief Austin Oborogbeyi-led UCMC from exercising authority on the people.

Commissioner of Police, Delta State, Mr. Zanna Ibrahim, asserted in a statement then, "On August 23, 2017, at about 1000 hours, the Secretary of Ugborodo Community Management Committee reported that 12 indigenes of the community, who left Warri to participate in a meeting, were ambushed by four speed boats on the waterways, which rammed into their boat and it sunk."

"It resulted to one Omayomi Samuel missing and his corpse was later recovered. 11 others reportedly swam to safety. The Marine Police and Nigeria Navy Service, NNS Delta mobilized," he said.

The state police boss later identified five leaders of the Ugborodo National Youth Movement, UNYM, as masterminds of the attack and subsequently declared them wanted for murder, kidnapping and armed robbery. Police had arraigned

some of the suspects in court already while about 23 persons were reportedly at large.

However, the instigators and their boys, who beat a retreat, following the manhunt for them by security agents, have continued to hold the community hostage.

The attack was to prevent the Oborogbeyi-led UCMC, which had been re-energized by the state governor, Senator Ifeanyi Okowa, in May, from gaining access to Ugborodo. Oborogbeyi and other UCMC members had embarked on the journey to their hometown to attend a congress, apparently called by the Eghara-Aja (oldest man), Pa Wellington Ojogor, to address the community on how the committee intended to execute its task.

A source revealed, "There has been a long drawn conflict on who should constitute the local authority over the community. A group led by the community's Olaja-Orori (spiritual head), Benson Omadeli, spurned what they viewed as a plot by non-resident elite of the community and the state government to foist the then Export Processing Zone (EPZ) Interface Committee on them.

It was to quiet the tension in the oil-rich community that Governor Okowa inaugurated the new committee, which included the Export Processing Zone, EPZ, committee and representatives from the community, but there is still animosity among the indigenes, which culminated in the August attack and fresh tension in the area.

Law enforcement agents have been hunting the ringleaders, but so far, the instrumentality of the law has not cowed the rival faction, which seemed to hold sway in Ugborodo, inflicting a reign of terror on the people.

Militant/bunkering camps



Villagers said the overconfidence of the boys opposed to the Oborogbeyi-led committee that has the imprimatur of the state government and the Olu of Warri, His Majesty Ikenwoli in establishing militant and bunkering camps at the outskirts of the community, from where they unleash terror on the people, have become another source of concern to the people.

“Security agents are in Warri and Asaba saying they are hunting for them but they are here in Ugborodo going about their illegal activities. They are presently recruiting boys to prepare for a second war against Oborogbeyi. They do not want his committee to step into Ugborodo and that is what is disquieting to villagers.

“Why should Oborgbeyi not come and take charge, they are in Warri pursuing court cases against those that attacked them and killed Mayomi, which is good and also traveling to Lagos and other places to meet Chevron Nigeria Limited, CNL. There is nothing wrong with that, but the criminals run affairs in the community. That is our problem,” one of the villagers said.

“As I speak to you, they are holding the people hostage and nobody can freely speak his mind. They are also involved in oil bunkering. Though some of us are in support of Oborogbeyi committee, but we cannot come out openly because we do not see them around, we see the bad boys, who keep intimidating us,” he added.

Raw display of power

According to a source, “On the day Mayomi was killed, the government – approved committee was coming to Ode-Ugborodo with police escorts for a meeting, but suddenly, there was sporadic shooting between Kpokpo and Madangho. Mayomi, who was about to join a boat from the Madangho jetty to Ode-Ugborodo, was hit by a stray bullet.”



“He collapsed on the spot and was rushed to a Warri hospital where he died. The armed boys told the police they would not allow the committee to come down to convene the meeting. They openly fired their guns in the air in the presence of the police. They also rammed one of their boats into one of our boats, which sank and resulted in drowning of Mayoma.

“They were wielding guns and other dangerous weapons and the only response of the leader of the police security team was that they had no mandate to use extreme force.

“In fact, he advised the committee members to retreat. The police complacency gave the criminals liberty to abduct five UCMC members, tortured them mercilessly before releasing them through the Nigerian Navy Service, NNS. The criminals in the community are not faceless. “Those sponsoring this unending violence are the same community criminals engaged in ceaseless bunkering in the community. They want the community to remain inaccessible to protect their oil crimes. It is difficult to explain that with a naval base and army post in the area, these criminals still go about to steal oil, kill and destroy with impunity,” he said.

Our source added that the attackers almost hijacked the remains of Samuel Mayomi apparently to destroy evidence.

Come home and take charge – Ojogor

Son of the Eghare-Aja of Ugborodo, Mr. Cyril Ojogor, who spoke the mind of worried villagers, urged the Oboroegbeyi committee to come home and cease administering the community from another domain.

His words, “The present executives of Ugborodo Management Committee, led by Barr Austin Oborogbeyi are not on ground in the community, the people want

the executives to be on ground, they should sit up and face the community where their obligation belong.

“There are lots of people in the community hoping and waiting for the Oborogbeyi-led government to surface in order to salvage the community from the state of anarchy that has faced it for a while. I find it difficult to understand why a management committee approved by the Eghare-Aja and Chairman of Ugborodo Council of Elders would shy away from the people and the community where they hold power.

“You cannot because of some few persons, who have been holding the community hostage, resist the entire people for either fear or favour because the people are beginning to lose faith over the procrastination.

“This is a committee that gained recognitions from the Olu of Warri and Delta state government. What is happening now is quite unimaginable. Ugborodo needs security, sufficient water supply, empowerment and awareness and the committee must be on ground to tackle the challenges,” he said.

Security agents should arrest culprits

“We understand that innocent lives were lost during the course of the struggle, we applaud the committee, police force and court for looking out for the culprits in order to get justice. But let us remind the committee that these same culprits are in the community where they keep attacking supporters of the committee and sending them out of the communities on daily basis,” Ojogor asserted.

He added, “I think the committee should go back to the communities with the security agencies to apprehend the culprits where they have camps, rather than waiting for them to submit themselves. I am using this medium to urge the Austin Oborogbeyi administration to see the end of the year as an opportunity to fix a congress at Ode-Ugborodo to harmonize all the indigenous people of Ugborodo

community, both at home and in Diaspora, to create awareness and acquaint them of what his administration has in stock.” he appealed.

Ode-Ugbordo, fertile Island for criminals- Eyengho

Saturday Vanguard could not reach the UCMC, Oboroegbeyi, for comment, but an executive member, Mr. Alex Eyengho, said, “That is not the issue. Those are mere distractions by the criminal elements and their sponsors. The real issue is that this community is very desirous of, first, flushing out all the criminal elements in Ode-Ugborodo (Aruton) because that is where the problem lies. And we have already started doing that by arraigning some of them in court. In addition, you are aware that the Nigerian Police had declared some persons wanted, 23 of them are at large. The police have officially declared the masterminds wanted for murder, kidnapping and armed robbery.

“So, there is no way any meaningful project or development can go on, particularly in Ode-Ugborodo. In the other four communities, there is no problem. It is in Ode-Ugborodo that you have the criminal elements because of its peculiarity of location. It is an Island’s island, hidden inside, where criminal elements can hide in their activities and it is more so because there is no government presence there in terms of security,” he said.

Eyengho disclosed, “Until we deal with the Ode-Ugborodo security situation headlong, and that is what we are doing, the conspiracy of blame game against the management committee makes no sense, we are however getting results.”

Committee strongly on ground

Eyengho dismissed the charge that the committee was not on ground, saying, “As to whether we are on ground, of course we are robustly on ground. We have been engaging with folks in Ogidigben, Ajudaibo, Madangho and Ijaghalla. These

communities are in touch with us and we must get it clear that five communities make up Ugborodo.”

“Only recently, we went with Shell to Ogidigben to sort out the water problem and it is from there that supply flows to Ode-Ugborodo and the other communities. We went with Shell, they took samples and that issue had been resolved, same with electricity issue. It had been resolved, quote me,” he asserted.

The UCMC member stated, “So, the propaganda that we are not on ground is just to distract the committee in desperation to make us back down on the fight for justice, sanity, peace and tranquility in Ode-Ugborodo, where you have all the criminal elements. We are going to flush them out. None of them can be more powerful than government, which has declared them wanted.”



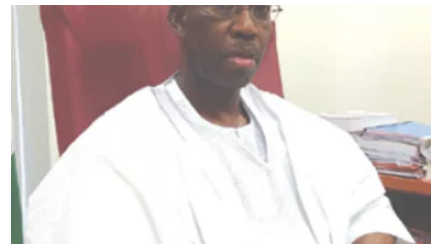
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