

## 10 feared dead, 5 abducted, police officer missing in Anambra land dispute

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*Police officer*

**...Anambra peace committee secures bail for detained parties, warns against further hostilities**

**...Drags warring factions to shrines for oath taking**

**By Nwabueze Okonkwo**

No fewer than 10 persons were feared dead, while a police officer attached to Nzam Police station was declared missing by the police authorities following a hostility that erupted from a land dispute between Allah/Onugwu community in Anambra West Local Government Area of Anambra State and their neighbouring community, Odekpe, also in the same council area of the state.

At the last count, while Allah/Onugwu community is claiming that they have so far lost about seven persons to the war, excluding five others who they alleged were abducted during the hostilities that lasted between April and June, this year,

Odekpe also claimed it has lost an unspecified number of its indigenes to the clash.

Police authorities arrested some indigenes of Odekpe community, including its Igwe-elect, Peter Ikechi for their alleged involvement in the missing of a police officer attached to Nzam Police Division.

To forestall further hostilities, the state government set up an eight-man peace committee to look into the crisis with a view to resolving it amicably and the committee had already swung into action to discharge its civic responsibilities without fear or favour.

The committee is headed by a first class royal father and traditional ruler of Igbariam community in Anambra East Local government Area of the state, Igwe Nkeli Nzekwe Kelly, with Dr. Emma Ude-Akpeh, the Permanent Secretary in the office of the Secretary to the State Government, SSG as its secretary.

Other members of the committee included Hon. Chinedu Obidigwe representing Anambra East/West in the national assembly; Hon. Udoba, representing Anambra West in the state House of Assembly and the traditional rulers of Mmiata-Anam, Igwe Nnose; his Owelle Ancient Kingdom counterpart, Igwe Anthony Onyekwele and that of Ukwalla community, Igwe Ajodo.

At the weekend, the committee invited representatives of the two warring communities at the Palace of Igwe Kelly of Igbariam, chairman of the committee and informed them that the committee has been able to secure the release of those from Odekpe community arrested by the IGP's Intelligence Response Team, IRT and detained in Abuja in connection with the missing police officer.

The committee therefore handed the two Odekpe persons just released by the police, Ekene Godwin and Peter Ikechi over to their Odekpe kinsmen with a condition that there should be no more hostilities in the area until peace is restored.

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Handing over the duo to Augustine Anara, a stakeholder from Odekpe, Igwe Kelly disclosed that one of the conditions given to the committee by both the police authorities and the state government was that there should be no more hostility in the areas.

Igwe Kelly further disclosed that the police authorities have pledged to drop the case in its entirety if violence no longer erupted in the area, adding that some of them who are still under the police custody would be released unconditionally as soon as peace returned to the areas

Also speaking, Ude-Akpeh, the committee secretary stated that in the process of trying to secure the release of the detained Odekpe indigenes, the committee discovered that their arrests was not prompted by a petition from Allah/Onugwu opponents but petitions from the family of the missing police officer and that of Governor Willie Obiano to the Presidency begging for assistance to quell the land dispute which claimed many lives and properties worth over N50 million before it was brought under control.

In his own speech, a member of the committee, Igwe Onyekwele of Owelle Ancient kingdom disclosed that during the hostility, Odekpe people at a point, abducted the Divisional Police Officer at Nzam and two Inspectors of police, took them into the bush, stripped them naked but he had to quickly dispatch some vigilante personnel from Owelle kingdom who rushed to the scene and rescued the three officers (DPO and two Inspectors), while the ASP remained missing till date.

Before the handover of the released Odekpe indigenes, the committee had taken the stakeholders from both warring communities to Igwe Kelly's Ofala Arena where Igwe Kelly himself and chief priests of four different shrines administered them on oath before the shrines, namely: Udude Onugu shrine from Igbariam; Amuziyi Nwanyi Nugu shrine also from Igbariam; Ogbanufe Oji Afam shrine from Anam and Aligom Ara shrine also from Anam.

Ikechi, the Igwe-elect of Odekpe told the committee that he was arrested by men of the IRT at Nteje/Awkuzu Junction along Enugu/Onitsha Expressway on June 12, 2020 while heading to Onitsha from Government House, Awka where they had gone for a meeting, detained at Area Command, Onitsha and whisked off to Abuja the next day and detained until the Igwe Kelly-led committee came and secured his bail between the last day of June and and first day of July, adding that during his detention, the police did not maltreat him in any manner.

Responding, Hon. Christian Akubueze from Allah/Onugwu and Augustine Anara from Odekpe commended the committee for its efforts so far in trying to resolve the dispute and pledged to remain peaceful until the dispute is resolved amicably.