

#ENDSARS: Cop, another killed as protests rock Delta, Edo, Imo, Abuja, others

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Police personnel yesterday clashed with protesters in Benin City, Edo State, Owerri, Imo State and Ughelli, Delta State, as calls for scrapping of the Special Anti-Robbery Squad, SARS, thickened.

At least, one policeman was killed in the Ughelli clash, even as protests also rocked Abuja, while security agencies beefed up security in Kano to stave off a similar protest.

Following killing of the policeman in the peaceful protest which turned violent, tension enveloped the Otovwodo axis of Ughelli, headquarters of Ughelli North Local Government Area.

The incident also led to the destruction of several cars as commuters along the East-West road axis of Otovwodo junction scampered for safety, following the series of gunshots that ensued while the melee lasted.

The protesters had begun their protest from the Otovwodo junction axis of Ughelli, and marched through Isoko road to market road while boycotting the Ughelli 'A' division police station to Ekuigbo and back to Otovwodo junction.

Protesting in a convoy of tens of exotic cars in company of some female protesters, one of the leaders of the protesters who identified himself as Ochuko, said they decided to boycott the police station in a bid to forestall a clash with policemen at the station.

It was gathered that some of the protesters who were apparently agitated, had met a team of policemen at Otovwodo junction where the protest walk was to end and a clash ensued.

An eye witness at the scene of the incident told Vanguard that upon sighting the policemen, the protesters opened fire, leading to the death of a policeman, while the others fled. One of the protesters was also reportedly killed by the policemen.

Though efforts to speak with the state Police Public Relations Officer, DSP Onome Onowakpoyeya, were fruitless at press time, the source who spoke on condition of anonymity, said: "Several cars were damaged, following the pandemonium that ensued as the protesters opened fire on the police team leading to the death of a police corporal.

“The corporal, who was on special duty at the scene of the incident identified as Stanley was until his death attached to Ughelli Police Area Command.”

In Benin City, Edo State, vehicular and human traffic was disrupted for several hours at the popular city centre, Ring Road, and adjoining roads, including Akpakpava Road, Airport Road, Sokponba road, Sapele road and others as hundreds of youths under the aegis of National Association of Edo Students, NAEs, and a coalition of civil society organisations staged a “SARS must go.” protest.

The peaceful protest went sour when the group arrived at the state headquarters of the State Police Command.

The protesters wanted to prevent a police van from entering the premises but the police vehicle ignored them and the driver wanted to run into them.

The incident led to some of the protesters jumping into the side drains of the road and in the process sustaining injuries

The protesters, who were dressed in black attires, carried placards bearing inscriptions such as: ‘end SARS before they end us’; ‘end SARS brutality now’; ‘we are not criminals, we are Nigerians’; ‘no to SARS’; ‘no to police reforms, among others, lamenting that SARS treat Nigerians, especially the youths, like second class citizens in their own country.

Speaking to newsmen on behalf of the youths, Okunbo Omokaro, noted that if SARS must exist in the country, its operatives must operate within the ambit of the law that set them up.

He said: “We have become second class citizens in our country, the youths of this nation no longer fear armed robbers and other criminals but rather SARS and other tactical units of Nigerian Police Force. They have put fears in us and we have become second class citizens in our country.

“We are here to say no to SARS and if SARS must exist, it must operate within the law that set it up. SARS is supposed to be anti-robbery; anti-cultism is supposed to be anti-cult, anti-kidnapping is supposed to be anti-kidnapping but every morning, police go to their station, sign up arms and go to the streets and use the arms against innocent citizens and intimidate and extort Nigerian youths.”

Also speaking, one of the protesters, Miss Precious Oruche said: “I am putting it to the authorities that if they don’t scrap SARS, then they are saying they are in support the evil SARS had been perpetrating. These men go around and pick

boys and girls randomly and collect thousands of naira for bail that is supposed to be free.”

Receiving the protesters, the Deputy Commissioner of Police, Finance and Administration, Kanayo Valentine, said the grievances of the protesters would be addressed.

On his part, the Police Public Relations Officer, Chidi Nwabuzor, said the Edo State Command has already complied with the directive of the Inspector General of Police.

“We all feel your pains but I want to tell you that the errors of some unscrupulous policemen cannot be rubbed on other good ones. I must tell you that since the pronouncement of the restriction of routine patrol by the IG, Edo State police command has fully complied with that directive.

“That is why today, you are not seeing SARS anywhere.”

In Owerri, Imo State, protesters clashed with the officers of Imo State police command.

The protest, started about 11:30 am along Okigwe road in Owerri, resulted in hot verbal exchanges between the police and the protesters.

Vanguard gathered that as the protest progressed, some policemen blocked the protesters at Imo State University, IMSU, junction, as a policeman, identified as Obioma Obi, was also said to have cocked his gun, threatening to shoot at the protesters.

It was learned that the cocking of the gun angered protesters who dared him to shoot at them, a situation which made both passersby and business owners to scamper for safety.

The protesters flared up, screaming “this is what we are saying, you have just cocked your gun. You can now shoot us if that will make you happy. We have done nothing just that we are protesting. You can kill us if that is your wish.”

The protest came barely days after Imo State Commissioner of Police, Isaac Akinmoyede, launched the monitoring and enforcement team, headed by Assistant Commissioner of Police, ACP, Emmanuel Asufi, on the ban on the operations of SARS in the state.

Similarly, scores of protesters, led by the trio of Omoyele Sowore, former presidential candidate and Hajia Aisha Yesufu of #Bring Back Our Girls, BBOG,

yesterday in Abuja, laid siege to the entrance of Force headquarters, demanding the scrapping of SARS.

Bearing placards calling for an end to SARS as a result of atrocities the Special Police squad has visited on Nigerians, the protesters lamented that the Inspector General of Police had failed to follow up on the several promises to reform the unit.

Some of the placards read: "EndSARSNOW," "WeDontNeedSARS,"

Shouting 'EndSARS,' while paralysing vehicular traffic on Shehu Shagari road, the protesters poured fresh blood on the road (which was later discovered to be blood of rams), to illustrate the killings and bloodshed perpetrated by SARS operatives.

They demanded to know what the IGP has done about many SARS operatives who have been indicted for rights violations, including extra-judicial killings, extortion, illegal detention and other misconduct.