



**UNVEILING:** Abia Deputy Governor, Sir Ude Oko Chukwu (middle) and others, during the unveiling of Abia Long Term Development Plan in partnership with Foundation for Partnership Initiative in Niger-Delta, PIND, in Umuahia.

## Ebonyi massacre: 15 persons killed, over 70 houses burnt

• As affected villages remain deserted • I counted 10 dead bodies myself —CSO, Ngbo clan • We have a recording of their (Fulani herdsmen) communication in our possession • From available security report, attackers are not our people —Ado LGA Chairman, Benue • I'm looking for my children; don't know their whereabouts —Victim • Attack led to displacement of 3,000 persons —37-yr-old farmer

By Peter Okutu

**ABAKALI—THERE** seem to be many twists and turns over the early morning killing of innocent Ebonyi indigenes on Monday in Ngbo Community of Ohaukwu Local Government Area of Ebonyi State.

Recall that the crisis between Effium and Ezza-Effium Communities is also taking place in the same LGA of Ohaukwu where many people have also been confirmed dead.

In an exclusive chat with Vanguard, the Chief Security Officer of Ngbo Clan, Leonard Igwe revealed the identity of the killers of his people in the four affected villages to be Fulani herdsmen.

According to him, 15 persons were killed in the attack as he personally counted 10 dead bodies.

He said: "To the best of my knowledge, it is suspected herdsmen because Agila people have their own way of fighting. The attackers collected the phone of one of the victims that escaped and when his uncle tried to reach him to get the situation report, it was a Fulani man that spoke with Fulani intonation that picked the call, telling him that the owner of the phone has died."

"The uncle forwarded this conversation to my security platform. Agila people don't sound that way. They are up to 15 people that were killed. We have taken record of 11 people that died. But I saw 10 persons with my eyes as four persons are still missing. There was another person that was given a machete cut. He was rushed to the hospital and later died in the night at a private hospital.

Four persons that are missing are nowhere to be found. More than three villages were attacked. It's up to four villages. I have all the names of all the people that were killed. It was yesterday that the Army

and Police went to the scene of the crime and towards evening time, they all left.

"As I am talking to you now, there is no presence of Army and Police in the affected villages except they are still preparing to come back. But they tried yesterday when they heard exchange of gunshots with those herdsmen."

"We want the government to intervene in this matter because if you hear in the radio and watch the television, you hear of herdsmen attacking people. We have age long dispute with Agila people and so, we know that the attackers are not Agila people. Thousands of our people have been displaced from the affected villages and they are taking refuge in nearby villages."

"Thousands of people were displaced. I cannot tell you the exact number of people that were displaced but properties worth millions of naira were destroyed. Over 50 houses were burnt down."

The Ebonyi State Government had from its preliminary report exonerated Fulani herdsmen from the attack even as the Commissioner for Inter-Governmental Affairs, Pastor Eze Nwachukwu Eze who is from Ohaukwu LGA stressed that Fulani herdsmen were not behind the attack.

Meanwhile, a source close to Vanguard revealed that the attack was allegedly carried out by Fulani herdsmen led by Agila people.

"It is not because of the Army that some idiot called, none of them would have gone free because we have already surrounded them."

But in a telephone conversation, the chairman of Ado Local Government Area of Benue State, James Oche, whose jurisdiction covers the Agila people, appreciated Vanguard for going extra mile to find out the true security situation in the killing that took place at Ngbo, Ebonyi State, on Monday.

He said: "I was surprised

when it was brought to my knowledge. My people know nothing about it. Yes, we have a boundary dispute with Ngbo people but recently, we have been committed to the Otse Otokpa/Cyril Obazi Agila/Ngbo Inter-community Peace and Security Committee set up by both Ebonyi and Benue States.

"We know nothing. The victims said they saw Fulani herdsmen, the government is saying otherwise. For me, it's contradictory. This is the height of falsehood because if the victims are saying these are the people that came to attack us, why are you calling the other people."

"This is what will ordinarily create tension. So, the way the government of Ebonyi State quickly ran to the press in a matter they have not properly investigated is not fair considering the peace we have with our neighbouring community of Ngbo."

"For me, when things like this happens especially when it borders on human beings and life, they try to do proper investigation before you rush to press. The press release yesterday can escalate a lot of issues. Both states of Ebonyi and Benue should continue what they are doing as regards the boundary issue."

"We investigated properly. I have security information that are available to me. It's not our people."

An indigene of Obodo Ocha Village, Umuogodo-Akpu Ngbo community in Ohaukwu Local Government Area of Ebonyi State, Mr Egbuu Sunday, said the attackers came from Benue State but however, added they were Fulani herdsmen.

He said that so many people were killed in the gruesome attack which according to him, had led to the displacement of over 3000 natives.

He said: "I am a native of Obodo Ocha village, Umuogodo-Akpu Ngbo community, in Ohaukwu Local Govern-

ment Area of Ebonyi State. I am 37 years old and I'm a farmer."

"As early as 5am on Monday morning, we heard gunshots repeatedly and we discovered that the invaders came from Benue State side. But actually, those attackers are Fulani herdsmen."

"When they invaded the village, they started burning our houses and killing people. We have over 70 houses down there that they burnt. They killed many people and you can see dead bodies right where I'm standing now."

One of the victims of the attacks who gave her name as Ngozi Ebonyi told Vanguard that the attackers arrived Ebele village shooting sporadically.

She said: "Before we woke up on Monday morning, we started hearing heavy gunshots. The gunshots were coming so close and we started scampering for safety. As we were running for our lives, we heard that one of our neighbours had been killed."

"They burnt my sewing machine, our motorcycles and other properties in our community. They also burnt many houses, including our own. They also shot many people."

"Since yesterday morning, I have not seen my children, I am looking for my children and I don't know their whereabouts. I have not eaten since morning."

Another survivor, Fedrick Onah said his people were killed in the attack.

His words: "I started hearing gunshots and came out. I was told that it was our enemies that attacked us. They killed many people and burnt houses."

Another villager, who gave her name simply as Ngozi, said she lost two of her relatives in the attacks.

"They killed my husband's two brothers — Chidibere and Emma Nwanjoku. They set all our houses ablaze and sacked us from our villages."