

Soldiers raze buildings in Abia community over death of colleagues

By Ugochukwu Alaribe

UMUAHIA—Soldiers attached to the 144 Battalion, Asa, Ukwu West council, Abia State reportedly razed buildings in Owaza community over the death of their colleagues.

Owaza is a boundary community between Abia and Rivers states.

Sources told *Vanguard* that gunmen, suspected to be oil thieves, had killed two soldiers at a location between Owaza and Obibor communities and escaped with their rifles. They were also said to have burnt the soldiers' patrol van.

The sources attributed the clash between the soldiers and the gunmen to the ban on oil bunkering in Rivers State with the latter unable to operate through the Owaza community due to soldiers guarding the area of the

pipelines.

According to the sources, "We heard the problem with the soldiers had to do with the oil bunkering. The ban on oil bunkering in Rivers State has affected the oil thieves; they are not comfortable with the soldiers at the Owaza-Obibor road. They attacked the soldiers and killed two of them while others fled.

"It was in retaliation that the soldiers laid siege to Owaza and burnt houses in the community. After burning houses in Owaza, the soldiers took over Owaza and all the neighbouring areas of Obuzor Asa, Umudobia to Obehie, Uzuaku, Okohia to Owaza. The people of Owaza have been made to suffer because of what they don't know."

Angered by the killing of their colleagues, the soldiers stormed the community setting fire to houses, shops and any structure on sight.

The situation caused the residents to flee the area with some of them

relocating to places like Obehie, Imo Gate, Ugwunago, even before the arrival of the rampaging soldiers.

At press time of filing this report, the community was still deserted as the residents had abandoned their homes for fear of victimization.

Contacted, the Public Relations Officer, 14 Brigade, Ohafia, Prince Omale, said he was yet to be briefed on the incident. However, a military official in the state said investigation has commenced into the incident.

Ikpeazu wades in, sues for calm

Reacting to the situation, Governor Okezie Ikpeazu has convened a meeting of stakeholders from the Ukwu West LGA and urged parties to give peace a chance and allow the state government to resolve the matter.

He urged the stakeholders not to allow the situation to degenerate as the government continues to engage the Army authorities on the matter.

Traffic offence: Anger as police officers harass.