

Soldier, 6 others killed as youth groups clash in Edo community

By Ozioruva Aliu

BENIN CITY— THERE are fear and anxiety in Obayantor community, Ikpoba-Okha Local Government Area of Edo State, as seven persons, including a soldier have reportedly died as a result of clash between rival youth groups in the community over leadership tussle.

Although the military has denied the death of any of its personnel, it was gathered that there was a clash that led to the deaths when a faction of the youth leadership in the community purportedly led security personnel into the community to comb it over alleged possession of firearms by a rival group and in the process, a soldier was reportedly killed and while on reprisal, no fewer than six people, mostly youths were killed.

A son-in-law to an 80-year-old woman, who does not want his name mentioned, said the incident happened on Saturday night and that his mother-in-law had to trek through the bush for hours before she was rescued and brought to him in Benin City.

"As I am talking to you, she is with me

in Benin City and we have to arrange for somebody to run errands for her because she trekked in the bush to nowhere. She said they didn't even know what happened but that on Saturday night, they started hearing gunshots everywhere in the community and they started running into the bush."

Contacted, the Police Public Relations Officer, Bello Kontongs, said: "It was a military operation, so I don't have any information on that but once I have, I will let you know."

Army reacts

But the Nigerian Army, 4 Brigade, Benin City, yesterday, said the brigade never carried out a reprisal attack in the community, rather it carried out operations in the community based on intelligence from the Department of State Service, DSS.

The brigade's Public Relations Officer, Capt. Yemi Sokoya, said following reports making the rounds, soldiers were not in the community because of reprisal, adding that the personnel of the brigade were guided by rules of engagement and code of

conduct for internal security.

He explained that the "brigade got a report from the DSS about hoodlums disturbing the community, and weapons being stockpiled, we found out that it was true, because as soon as we got there, some of the hoodlums engaged the troops.

"However, even if there was a communal issue before now, with what is happening in the country today, if you are a commander and you are told people are stockpiling weapons somewhere, you will go there and ensure that the weapons were seized, and those involved arrested. I think that is the right thing to do and that is exactly what the commander did.

"The issue of communal crisis is not part of why we went there. It was basically on the report that hoodlums in that community were stockpiling weapons and terrorising the community."

He said in the course of the operations, weapons, which include two AK-47 rifles, three English Pump Action guns, one double barrel, 32 cartridges, five mobile phones and an ID card belonging to the state vigilante were recovered.