

Many killed, 300 houses destroyed as communal conflict erupts in C'River



Gov Otu

By Emma Una

CALABAR—TWO communities, Ovonum and Ofatura, in Obubra Local Government Area of Cross River State, are locked in communal strife, which has left many dead and over 300 houses destroyed.

The conflict, which was caused by a dispute over a parcel of land at their farm areas, has left thousands of people homeless, following the destruction of residential houses and farmlands.

"In April, this year, there was an outbreak of conflict between the two communities which left many dead and houses destroyed. Recently, on Independence Day, the misunderstanding arose again inside the plantation and fight started between youths of both communities

"The crisis got to the climax when youths from both sides got home and related the information of what took place at the plantation to their elders and at about midnight, there was an outbreak of violence between the two communities". A resident of the area, Elom Obongha told Vanguard on phone.

He said throughout the night, there was fighting between the two communities and by the time soldiers were dispatched to the area by dawn, a lot of havoc had been inflicted on both sides.

"By the time the soldiers arrived, a lot of damage had been done and now thousands of people are now taking refuge at Matter Mesricodia Catholic Church," he said.

The House of Assembly member representing the area in the Cross River State House of Assembly, Egbe Abeng said he had no hand in the conflict.

"I can tell you that the peace enjoyed in the community is because of my intervention. When I got a call about the outbreak of the recent problem, I moved quickly from Yala where I was on an oversight function down to my community and I tried to mobilise the security to intervene.

"The destruction is on both communities and with the help of Governor Bassey Otu a detachment of soldiers is stationed there to restore peace. Therefore, I call on the government to interrogate the leadership of both Ofatura and Ovoum because they need to find lasting peace to this problem. I am a peacemaker and Ovonum people voted for me and contributed to my emergence. So why should I sponsor a war against them"

In an emotion-laden tone, an Ovonum man, Enang, lamented thus: "My community has been decimated and our property destroyed. Over three thousand Ovonum persons are now refugees in their own land. We are now hibernating at a Catholic church with no food and water to even drink. We call on government and other Non-government Organisations to come to our aid before we suffer outbreak of epidemic. We have not witnessed this kind of destruction on our community".

An indigene of Ofatura, Justine Ovat said: "The recent crisis is unfortunate. The Adon Kingdom made peace after the April conflict and while we were still trying to settle down, another crisis occurred culminating in the destruction of houses in both communities. I call on all leaders to come to a round table to find lasting solution to these conflicts."