

The South South NEWS

Killings in A'lbom as struggle for ownership of oil rich Stubbs gets messier

By Egufe Yafugborhi
& Chioma Onuegbu

Uyo—Lingering conflict between the Ekids people across Eket and Esit Eket local Government Areas (LGA) and Ibena LGA neighbours over ownership of oil rich Stubbs Creek in Akwa Ibom state got messier as violence erupted Monday flowing to Tuesday.

What youths from Eket, Esit Eket, Onna, Mkpai Enin and Ikot Abasi LGAs professed as "peaceful demonstration" under the platform of Coalition of Aboriginal Coastland Communities, turned mayhem, leading to burning of houses and armed attacks on Ibena residents.

As at the time of filing this report, two persons reportedly lost their lives during the attack, but the State Police Command said it could not confirm fatalities without seeing any corpse.

Police Public Relations Officer, SP Odiko MacDon, asserted, "The Command cannot confirm any loss of life for now because no dead body has been seen."

"However, the Command hereby confirms that some persons were injured and are receiving treatment. Some houses were burnt and access route barricaded but as at now, normalcy has to a large extent been restored."

Inscription on some of the placards flown by the protesters read: "We demand for the immediate payment of the blocks damaged by in Esit Urua land", "BUA Refinery and Petrochemical Ltd are trespassers, leave our land alone".

The youths had ahead of the protest blame the conflict over failure of the state government to implement the New Map of Akwa Ibom state that sparked controversy across the state last year (2023).

The statement signed by Dr Samuel Udonsak reads in part, "On Wednesday, 7th February, 2024, at about 10 am, Mr Stephen Imoh Ekpe, an indigene of Esit Urua, had about 7000 moulded blocks at his building



Victims undergoing medical attention

therefore no longer available for their use.

"In the days to come we would present our minimum irreducible demands for compliance. We make it very clear, that though ExxonMobil, Sterling Oil, BUA, etc pretend not to be located on our land and connive with settlers to oppress us, this action has nothing to do with them."

"We repeat, that this is a peaceful protest in furtherance to obtain justice for our forebears and justice for our generations unborn. The State Government is very much informed of the facts and had failed to stand up to defend truth and justice. We want justice and those in power know that. It's time for it to act. The time is now."

The government, reacting through the Commissioner for Information, Ini Ememobong, pointed that the accusers were acting out of ignorance as the state would do nothing in support or against the said Map for obvious reasons.

Ini, calling Eket Nation/Ibena people to let peace reign, admonished traditional and political leaders to act as enablers of peace and not catalysts of conflict, as history is capturing the dramatic personae of the crisis.

He stated, "The Government of Akwa Ibom has advised all parties to the conflict which led to the recent blockage of the Eket/Ibena highway to allow peace reign, to avoid loss of lives and damage to property."

"While the Government recognizes that this conflict is rooted in heritage claims which date back to pre-independence times, it is constrained by the subsisting court actions on the same subject matter."

"It is the position of the state Government that until all these cases are resolved, nothing will be done in support or against the m

Map. In the interim, we urge all parties to either await the judgement of the court, or explore peaceful means in resolving their



CP Ayilara storms scene of mayhem

Massive Mopol deployment

site in Esit Urua destroyed by Ibena youths.

"The Eket LGA Transition Chairman, who went to inspect the damage, was assaulted by Ibena youths in presence of security agents. The Aboriginal LGAs are aggrieved that access roads to the Atlantic shoreline are created on our land for the settlers while we are denied same, further balkanising our land for settlers to grab. We have had enough."

"There is so much victimisation on us in our land. We have to seek justice, and we have to do so now. Effective 3am today, the Coalition of Aboriginal Coastal LGAs has imposed a total blockade on settlers. Our roads are

issues. "Government will not surrender her primary duty of protecting lives and property for any reason. Consequently, the Governor, Pastor Umo Eno, has directed the Commissioner for Internal Security and Waterways to interlace with security agencies and put them on red alert to handle any adverse situation that may arise therefrom."

Meanwhile, a trending video over the crisis exposed the reason for the February 26 protest and bludgeoned of the only two access roads to Ibena was to coerce Governor Umo Eno to implement the recommendations of the Akwa Ibom state Elders Council Committee which is against the Law and to the detriment of the Ibena people and the entire local government.

It noted that "at about 4pm same Monday, 'men on Uniform' suspected to be government forces arrived the scene, teargassed the onlookers and the protesters alike. Dispersed the protesters and access to Ibena restored."

"About 6pm when the Men in Uniform left the Eket and Esit Eket armed protesters advanced into Iwuochang Community in Ibena LGA, fired shots sporadically, raised down some residential buildings, and business places. In all these Ibena people still remained calm and law-abiding."

Findings revealed that Foursquare Gospel Church, Iwuochang in Ibena was among the structures torched during the attack.

An indigene of Ibena community, Mr Asuquo wondered why the coalition of Aboriginal Coastland communities claim that they were on a peaceful demonstration to persuade the governor to heed their demands and yet went ahead to cause violence on law-abiding citizens.

"When you go to block access roads, stop people from going to their normal businesses, grounding economic activities, burnt down people's houses and Churches you cannot call that a peaceful demonstration", Asuquo lamented.

The Transition committee chairman of Ibena visited victims of the attack at the Hospital on Tuesday, with some of them left with deep machete cuts, on the stomach, forehead and other dangerous injuries.

Although the land tussle has lingered over the decades, the current agitations over the ownership as usual started since BUA company decided to establish a refinery on the land.

Also worried over the violent attack, a lawyer and indigene of Ibena privy to the lingering struggle, Diamond Akpanika, noted that it is only whenever any company indicates interest to invest in the land that the Ekids (Eket and Esit Eket LGAs) will resume agitation over the ownership.

"Anytime any company wants to come in to invest that is when they will start saying, you must pay compensation to Eket people, although that place is in Ibena local government, but that they (Ekids) are



Stakeholders gathered

the original owners.

"That is how they have succeeded in chasing away so many companies that would have invested on the land over the years. How can you own a land in another persons Local government?", Akpanika queried.