

The Mourning

After

The Onitsha crisis may have ended but it is now payback time for some principal characters in the saga, including the AIG zone 9 and MASSOB

Assistance Commissioner of Police, Awka command.

Ajakaiye, THEWEEK gathered, was believed to have used one Aloysius Orji, a.k.a. High Tension, to cause confusion and benefit from same at the Bridge Head Market in Onitsha until

things got too hot for both master and accomplice following petitions by the Anambra State chapter of the Civil Liberties Organization (CLO). According to CLO's petition to the Inspector-General of police by its Anambra chapter chairman, Emeka Umeagbalasi, captioned, "The AIG zone 9 and the Onitsha Bridge Head Market Based Felons Are Determined To Unleash Violence On The Over 20,000 Traders At The Onitsha Bridge Head Market", and dated August 9, 2006, information reaching the CLO had it that the AIG had ordered the Anambra State police command through the AC state CID, Awka, to drop a criminal complaint under investigation by the state CID and transfer same to the AIG's office at Umuahia

even after part of the investigation had already been concluded and charged to court. Also this was in spite of the go-ahead order by Sunday Ehindero, Inspector-General of Police, to the AC CID, Awka, Alhaji Mohammed Katsina, to investigate some complaints (in-

as the boss of all the police commands that make up zone 9 with headquarters at Umuahia, Abia State. Indeed, so much was expected

ed of him when he was posted to the zone but instead of receiving the accolades that go with good performance, the embattled police officer was unceremoniously transferred over his questionable role in the crisis. And to go with him, are the Divisional Police Officer DPO Onitsha, Mathew Uyanna and

BY JUDE ATUPULAZI, AWKA

Until recently, Assistant Inspector-General of police, Ade Ajakaiye, was standing tall



MASSOB: Mourning the dead

cluding the one in question) that included an attempted murder, arson, illegal possession of fire arms, stealing and torture. The I.G.'s directive was based on a series of criminal complaints by the Anambra CLO.

THEWEEK gathered that the IG's directive came at the same time Governor Peter Obi was moving against what Umeagbalasi termed, "the entrenched criminal activities in the state" being perpetrated by Aloysius Orji, Chukwudi Ezechukwu and Johnson Udeani.

Following the petitions, some arrests were made on July 19 this year, landing Orji and Ikechukwu Offor in the net. Though they were detained and arraigned before an Onitsha Chief Magistrate court on July 27 on a 7-count charge, they were later granted bail controversially. The two men were said to have regrouped later with others, now at large, to launch unprovoked attacks and violence against the traders on July 28, 29, 30 and 31 through two men believed to be working for Orji (Celestine Ukaoha and Osita Ejimonye) in defiance of their bail conditions. This was accompanied by threats of assassinations, abductions, acid bathing, and poisoning on some CLO members and some victims of Orji.

This led to the re-ordering of the arrest of the bailed Orji and Uzor by the police and the setting up of a 5-man special security team by the new police commissioner, John Haruna.

The team was saddled with the task of hunting Aloysius Orji, Chukwudi Ezechukwu, Johnson Udeani and other members of the terror gang. Eventually, four of Orji's gang members were arrested, much to the delight of the traders.

Their celebration was, however, cut short when AIG Ajakaiye suddenly ordered the transfer of the case from Awka to Umuahia, taking over the exhibits and case file, an action, Umeagbalasi believes, was aimed at reaching out to a certain syndicate at the Anambra Justice ministry to write a no-case legal advice in order to effect the discharge of those arraigned in court.

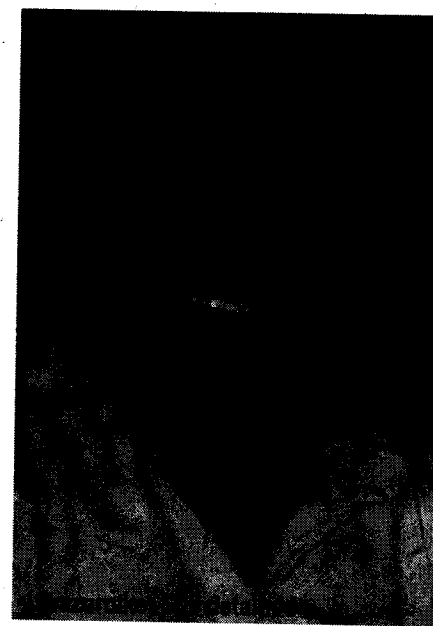
"In the course of Mr. Aloysius Orji's arrest and detention at the state CID, some emissaries who came to bribe the AC, state CID in the form of securing police bail were allegedly sent via the said AIG's office," Umeagbalasi alleged in his petition to the I-G. Katsina of the state CID, Umeagbalasi went on, was reportedly offered a N.5 million bribe by one of the AIG's emissaries

but Katsina, a devout Muslim, refused. The bribe was to prevent Orji from being paraded before the press, while another N.1.5 million was allegedly offered as bribe to Katsina to facilitate Orji's bail but Katsina once more turned it down. Among the emissaries were a traditional ruler and a well known transporter.

The CLO boss, also disclosed to this magazine that the AIG instigated the counsel to the detainees to petition his office with some unfounded allegations so that the matter would be 'properly' investigated. "He specifically asked the counsel to allegedly implicate some names, including Emeka Umeagbalasi, Peter Okala, and Uzor A. Uzor so that they would be ruthlessly dealt with," Umeagbalasi stated in his petition. This prompted Umeagbalasi to among other demands, request that the AIG be transferred immediately, even as he claimed to have gotten news of the arrest of Uzor by men suspected to have been sent by the AIG. The men, this magazine gathered, were led by Ezechukwu, Orji and some killer thugs.

Further similar petitions were written to the chairman Police Service Commission on August 10 and to the I-G police on 16 August, 2006.

In response to the situation at the Bridge Head Market, Governor Obi sacked the Orji-led regime and appointed in its stead, a 7-man caretaker committee led by Chief Ben Ezeibe to run the affairs of the market pending the conduct of elections later. Obi had also pressured the federal government into re-deploying scores of police officers in his relentless effort to restore sanity to the beleaguered and crisis ridden state which has just marked 15 years of existence. According to the governor, this was a prelude to his plans to completely transform Onitsha



Ehindero: Removes Ajakaiye

where virtually all the major and link roads will be aggressively constructed from September once the rains subside. He had also commenced the environmental sanitation of the commercial city that ranks among the dirtiest in Africa but which was ignored by past regimes. Obi's efforts so far in combating crime in Onitsha which for the first time saw the expulsion of NARTO hoodlums and other miscreants from Onitsha have made him an overnight hero.

According to Umeagbalasi, "I think the government of Anambra State as presently constituted, took a very bold and courageous step towards giving Anambra State, including Onitsha, a direction towards the corridor of conventional government." Umeagbalasi commended Peter Obi on the new understanding between the state and the federal government that had been impacting positively on the state.

Meanwhile, the caretaker committee which has since gone into action has confirmed that Aloysius Orji is the cause of the problems at the Bridge Head Market and according to its chairman, Ben Ezeibe, measures are being adopted to contain the situation, even as the state commissioner



of police has ordered the arrest of Orji at all costs.

But as the Anambra citizenry are rejoicing over Obi's resolution of the crisis, members of the Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB), are counting their losses, just as Onitsha landlords plan to massively evict suspected MASSOB members from their houses. In a press statement made available to THEWEEK, the assistant director of information for MASSOB, David Mac David, said the organization was mourning the loss of 760 MASSOB members, that lost their lives during the crisis. Condemning the invitation of the police and the army, MASSOB, in what sounded like a funeral oration, lamented, "with heavy heart and sorrows in our heart, we the entire members of MASSOB, regret to announce the untimely demise of our great personalities and great gems who were sent to the great beyond by the heartless brutes and trigger-happy Nigerian police/Mopol and army. Our dear slain, let us pause a little to ask this question: why were you all slain? Just because you are a Biafran rather than the evil empire called Nigeria. We salute you all for your wise decisions. You are truly great

heroes". MASSOB in the release, alleged that their slain members met their end in areas like Fegge, Akpaka Forest, Idemili North and South, Okpoko, Obosi, Okija, Ihiala, Nnewi, Awka, Ekwulobia, Oko, Awkuzu, Nsugbe, Aguleri, Umuleri and at Odekpe Atani road. MASSOB's claims could not however be substantial by this magazine in the course of investigations as even the police denied knowledge of any such happening.

MASSOB is also battling to convince Onitsha landlords that those they planned to evict from their houses are innocent of any crime. According to Mac David, plans are afoot by MASSOB to parley with the landlords in this direction, as well as to talk to the various churches to help spread the message of MASSOB's innocence. Mac David said that those that caused trouble were only infiltrators who used MASSOB's name to, among other things, force landlords to reduce their rents, terrorize traders and kidnap people before demanding ransoms later. "No, this is not part of MASSOB's programmes. We've never been involved in such activities and will never be involved," Mac David asserted.

He expressed happiness at the new cooperation between Onitsha residents and soldiers leading to the sacking of suspected NARTO thugs at Silas Works Road /Ozubulu Street and the arrest and handover of one of the hoodlums to the soldiers who were then told to occupy the place previously occupied by the hoodlums.

Meanwhile, a new AIG for zone 9, Umuahia, Dickson Uzoma, is to replace Ajakaiye. Uzoma is coming from zone 4, Makurdi and expectations are that he will sustain the peace that has been enthroned in Onitsha and other parts of Anambra through the combined efforts of Governor Obi and John Haruna, Anambra's new police boss.