



Refugee Documentation Centre (Ireland)  
LEGAL AID BOARD

## **Nigeria - Researched and compiled by the Refugee Documentation Centre of Ireland on 14 October 2011.**

### **Treatment of the Esan ethnic group in Uromi?**

A report from the *Vanguard* published in August 2011 notes:

“Governor Adams Oshiomhole of Edo State, in this interview, bares his mind on what he expects from President Goodluck Jonathan in the unfolding dispensation. He also shares his views on the call for the abrogation of the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) and how his party, the Action Congress of Nigeria, ACN, defeated the Peoples Democratic Party, PDP, in Edo State.” (*Vanguard* (29 May 2011) *Nigeria: Ministerial List - the Mistakes Jonathan Must Avoid – Oshiomhole*)

The report also notes:

“The former Minister of State for Defence, Mike Onolehmemen, recently accused you of fighting Esans in your administration. Do you have a problem with the Esan ethnic group?”

(laughter) They have no response to the challenge we have posed to them; so they resorted to ethnicity. As I speak, the most important ministry in most governments is the ministry of finance. My Commissioner for Finance is from Esanland. When an Esan man (Osunbor) was governor here, he was unable to work with the commissioner for finance, so the man had to resign his appointment on account of the fact that he was being sidelined.

Now, I had a commissioner for finance from Esanland who I did not know before I became a governor.

He was appointed strictly because I wanted technocrats. And, he oversees everything happening in my government unlike the PDP politicians who will appoint, just like Osunbor did, the accountant from their own part of the state. My accountant-general is from Benin. My financial transactions are in the hands of an Esan man and a Bini man.

That tells you about the character of the governor and my idea about loyalty and trust. The commissioner for land and housing is from Esan. And the ministry in charge of water and energy are in the hands of an Esan man. If I drop two commissioners out of five and three remain what statement does it make? Second, have we replaced the commissioners from Esanland with any other part? Have I brought Edo North or Edo South persons to replace them? Onolememen is in trouble, they have to look for new crowd to canvass support. All I have done is to challenge them with facts!” (ibid)

A report from the *Daily Champion* published in May 2011 notes:

“Political office holders of Esan ethnic nationality, who could not deliver their areas to Oshiomhole's ACN in the elections, have been given the boot. The governor could not hide his pains arising from his party's loss in the zone; he also could not hold back his disdain for both his failed foot soldiers in the zone and the zone itself.

He has also, curiously, transcended the confines of political governance to the academia where for the same reason of rejection at the polls by the electorate in the zone, many of them students of the ill-funded Ambrose Alli University in Ekpoma, he removed the Vice Chancellor. Whatever official reasons he gave for doing so were mere façade.

There are indications that the government of the day in Edo State is earmarking top Esan indigenes in the University for either demotion or outright sack. Whether the proposed strike in protest of these anomalies by the ASUU will yield positive result is yet to be seen.

The comrade governor has demonstrated his intolerance for the capacity of the Edo people, especially the Esan ethnic nationality, to express alternative views, which are the essence and bedrock of democracy. All the people cannot choose to be subservient to his philosophy of governance.” (Daily Champion (23 May 2011) *The Politics of Ethnic Cleansing in Edo [analysis]*)

The report continues:

“The question that should be asked is: how far will this kind of ethnic cleansing take the Oshiomhole's government in Edo ahead of the 2012 governorship election? The good people of Edo should be concerned and resist this policy of ethnic cleansing before we all get consumed.” (ibid)

Another article published by the *Daily Champion* on 19 May 2011 notes:

“As various stakeholders and ethnic groups continue intense lobby for the position of Speaker of the Edo state House of Assembly, a group, Esan Good Governance Group (EGGG) has cautioned against any move by some individuals and their agents, saying such is capable of destabilizing the peace and stability of the state.

In a press statement made available to Daily Champion in Benin, signed by the chairman of the group, Peter Agboinfioro and secretary, comrade Olumhense Akhigbe, the group warned that the move to alter the political arrangement in the state by empowering one senatorial district above others will be highly resisted, adding that all reasons adduced for trying to embark on such an 'unholy move' are all untenable, unparliamentarily, unjust and unacceptable.

The statement added that moves to move the speakership from Edo Central to Edo South as being rumoured in some quarters is tantamount to creating an everlasting bickering between the various ethnic groups in the state.” (Daily champion (19 May 2011) *Agitations Deepen Over Edo Speakership*)

A report in *Africa News* published in January 2005 notes:

“PALPABLE fear now pervades the Uromi town in Esan North East Local Government area of Edo State over alleged indiscriminate arrest, brutality and shooting by Mobile policemen deployed, last Thursday, to the area following last week violent protest against the killing of a student by a police constable, which led to the burning of the Uromi Divisional Police station and Police Residential Quarters by the irate youths.

Already 15 persons have so far been arrested by the State Police Command in connection with the carnage that has displaced over 200 police officers, while the residents of the town through a petition to the Assistant Inspector General of Police, Mr Yakubu Mohammed accused the mobile policemen of brutality and abduction of persons, not connected with the protest and destruction, to an unknown destination.

Just as eminent persons in the town including the Chairman of the Council, Mr Andrew Egbadon appealed for calm and amicable resolution of the crisis with a vow to relocate the police officers displaced and the Divisional Police Station as part of conditions for peaceful co-existence between the police and the people of the area.

Vanguard gathered that commercial activities in the town have remained paralysed and major markets closed down following the alleged extra-judicial treatment being handed the people by the deployment of armed mobile policemen into the town and the rumoured reprisal attack being planned by the men and the indiscriminate arrest of residents.” (Africa News (17 January 2005) *Nigeria; Fear Grips Uromi Town Over Indiscriminate Arrests*)

*Africa News* reported in February 2005:

“THE people of Uromi Community in Esan North East Local Government Council of Edo State last weekend warned against biased investigation into the incident that led to the burning, in January, of the Divisional Police Headquarters and police residential quarters by youths protesting the killing of a driver by police constable in the area, demanding for an administrative panel of enquiry to smoothen the relationship between the police and youths in the area.

According to them, though the reconstruction and rehabilitation process have started, there is need to investigate the issues of illegal occupancy within the police barracks and the various issues of violent attacks, indiscriminate arrests and extortion from innocent residents of the town by the mobile policemen deployed to the area during the crisis and apportion blames to all concerned.

Addressing newsmen at the weekend in Benin City on the peace process and reconstruction in the area, the President and Publicity Secretary of the Uromi Community Association (UCA), Mr Mike Ovonlen and Mr John Ejenata warned that at the stage the reconstruction of only the damage done to police is going without consideration for that done the people of the community there may still exist bad blood between them and the people.” (Africa News (22 February 2005) *Nigeria; Community Warns On Investigation Into Razing of Police Station*)

## References

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This response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Refugee Documentation Centre within time constraints. This response is not and does not purport to be conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim to refugee status or asylum. Please read in full all documents referred to.

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