Responses to Information Requests (RIR) respond to focused Requests for Information that are submitted to the Research Directorate in the course of the refugee protection determination process. The database contains a seven-year archive of English and French RIRs. Earlier RIRs may be found on the UNHCR’s Refworld website.

NGA104208.E

Nigeria: The Black Axe confraternity, also known as the Neo-Black Movement of Africa, including their rituals, oaths of secrecy, and use of symbols or particular signs; whether they use force to recruit individuals (2009-November 2012)
Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Ottawa

1. Background

Sources indicate that the Black Axe confraternity is a cult (Leadership 27 July 2012; Vanguard 27 July 2012; Coventry Cathedral Feb. 2009, 10). According to Coventry Cathedral, a Church of England’s place of worship that has existed for over 1,000 years (ibid. n.d.) and that has been “extensively involved” in Nigeria since 2002, the Black Axe confraternity and some other cult groups "were formed in the 1980s as tools of the Nigerian military and they in turn formed street cult groups" (ibid. Feb. 2009, 6, 10). Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

2. The Neo-Black Movement of Africa (NBM)

Sources state that the Black Axe confraternity is also known as the Neo-Black Movement of Africa (NBM) (Daily Trust 3 May 2012; This Day 6 Jan. 2012). However, sources indicate that, according to the NBM, they are not the Black Axe confraternity nor are they a secret cult (Vanguard 11 Jan. 2012; The Guardian 30 Dec. 2009). The Coventry Cathedral states that the Black Axe confraternity is a "splinter group" of the NBM, and indicates that, since 1985, the NBM "sought to dissociate itself from the Black Axe Confraternity's activities" (Feb. 2009, 97-98).

According to the NBM’s website, the group was created during the 1977-1978 academic year by nine University of Benin undergraduates who were concerned about the "plight of the Black Man" (NBM n.d.). The NBM website further states that within "a decade of its existence the Movement was operational in most major tertiary institutions in Nigeria," but later withdrew its operations from university campuses in 1994 due to the "wave of violence" at Nigerian universities that started in the late 1980s (ibid.). Coventry Cathedral indicates that NBM is not a confraternity and excludes students and fraternity members from its organization (Feb. 2009, 97). According to the NBM, they have "Zones" in most large cities across the world, and their headquarters is located in Benin City, Edo State (NBM n.d.).

Sources indicate that the NBM is legally registered as an organization (Vanguard 11 Jan. 2012) with the Corporate Affairs Commission (Daily Trust 3 May 2012; Nigeria Daily News 30 Dec. 2009). However, sources point out that Rivers State enacted the Secret Cult and Similar Activities (Prohibition) Law in 2004 (Vanguard 19 Aug. 2007; NDPEHRD Aug. 2004, 3). The Black Axe confraternity and the NBM have been banned under this law (ibid.; CODESRIA 2011, 22).

According to the NBM website, their objectives include: "the redirection of all minds towards Black Realism and Determinism" and teaching people discipline of the body and mind, preventing negative images of Black people, conducting research on traditional African religions, and publishing a regular magazine called Uhuru (NBM n.d.). The NBM’s magazine Uhuru used to be called the Black Axe Magazine (ibid.). According to the website: "the Axeman (a member of the Neo Black Movement) is always expected to talk with Reason, act with Courage and behave with Grace; this has served as our code of conduct" (ibid.).

Media sources report that the NBM:

- donated medication to health centres in Uhunmwode local government area of Edo state in March 2010 (Plus News Pakistan 31 Mar. 2010);
organized free medical treatment, including for malaria and blood checks, to 200 people at Kwale West local government area of Delta State in January 2010 (Vanguard 4 Jan. 2010); and
provided money for a sick abandoned baby in Ughelli, Delta state in 2009 (ibid. 24 Sept. 2009).

3. Black Axe Confraternity Recruitment

A 2007 Human Rights Watch report indicated that the Black Axe confraternity forcibly recruits new members (Oct. 2007, 24). Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

According to Vanguard, a Lagos-based newspaper, the Edo state Police Public Relations Officer indicated that generally, cult activities are secretive (24 Jan. 2011). Information on rituals, oaths of secrecy, and use of symbols or particular signs of the Black Axe confraternity could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

4. Black Axe Confraternity Cult Violence by State

On 22 September 2008, the Nigerian Ministry of Education indicated that there has been an upsurge of cult-related violence in tertiary institutions across Nigeria (Nigeria 22 Sept. 2008).

4.1 Abuja

The Daily Trust, an Abuja-based newspaper, reports that a clash between the Black Axe confraternity and the Vikings confraternity left a student cult member of the University of Abuja injured in 2009 (7 May 2009). Vanguard also indicates that in 2009 a University of Abuja Black Axe member was arrested for attempted kidnapping of two ministers for ransom (18 Sept. 2009).

4.2 Delta

Leadership, an Abuja-based newspaper, states that cult activities, including Black Axe confraternity's activities, have reached an "alarming" level in Delta state, and are "surprisingly uninterrupted in the various higher institutions in the state" (27 Oct. 2011). Leadership also indicates that rival cults clashed almost daily in January and February 2011, and reports on the death of six people (21 Feb. 2011).

On 11 August 2011, Vanguard reported that a clash between the Black Axe confraternity and the Mafite cult resulted in the death of two Delta State University students, with unconfirmed sources indicating that five people were killed.

4.3 Edo State

In Benin City, Edo State, media sources reported on cult wars between the Black Axe confraternity and the Eiye [also called Eye and Aiye] confraternity which include the following accounts of violence:

- in July 2012, Leadership reported that 4 people were killed in 2 days (27 July 2012), while the Lagos-based newspaper the Guardian reported that 6 suspected cult members were killed (27 July 2012);
- in January 2012, media sources reported on the death of 8 people (This Day 6 Jan 2012; Vanguard 11 Jan. 2012);
- in May 2011, Vanguard reported that 18 people were killed (26 May 2011);
- in January 2011, Vanguard indicated that 10 people were killed (24 Jan. 2011);
- in February 2009, 7 suspected cultists were killed according to Vanguard (23 Feb. 2009);
- Plus News Pakistan indicated that in February 2009, more than 16 people were reportedly killed, including 2 university students and a prominent businessman (11 Mar. 2010).

Media sources have also reported on cult wars involving the Black Axe confraternity and other cults, including:

- in August 2012, during a clash with the Vikings confraternity at Ambrose Alli University, two students were killed, reportedly after an altercation between a Black Axe member and an anti-cultist student (PM News 7 Aug. 2012; PTI 8 Aug. 2012);
- on 22 October 2010, Vanguard stated that during a clash with Maphite confraternity in Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma, 7 people were killed, while police confirmed 3 deaths;
- in March 2010, according to Plus News Pakistan, there was a "renewed bloody clash" with Manfile confraternity (11 Mar. 2010);
- in March 2010, This Day reported that, in a war with the Markvites, 9 cult members were killed (15 Mar. 2010).

In March 2009, the son of the Chairman of Ovia South West local government council was abducted by people
suspected of being cult members (The Nation 16 Mar. 2009; Vanguard 12 Mar. 2009), including members of Black Axe (ibid.). The child was released in exchange for ransom (The Nation 16 Mar. 2009).

4.4 Ekiti

Media sources indicate that in July 2011, 13 students at the Ekiti State University were wounded during a clash between the Black Axe confraternity and the Aiye confraternity (Leadership 7 July 2011; Daily Trust 7 July 2011).

4.5 Imo


4.6 Lagos

Vanguard reports on cult wars between the Black Axe and the Eiye confraternities in which "many people" have been killed and "several" have been wounded in March 2012 in Ijanikin, including the death of a 26 year-old who was not a member of any cult group (Vanguard 19 Mar. 2012). The newspaper adds that there are "daily killings and maiming of rival members" of Black Axe and Eiye confraternities in this area (ibid.). On 27 July 2011, 3 people were killed during a clash between the Black Axe confraternity and the Eiye confraternity in Ikorodu (Daily Independent 1 Aug. 2011; The Nation 29 July 2011).

4.7 Nasarawa

The Daily Trust reports that a Black Axe confraternity member killed a member of the Vikings cult in September 2011 in Lafia (20 Sept. 2011).

4.8 Ogun

The Daily Independent, a Lagos-based newspaper, reports that, in March 2010, in Sagamu, Ogun State, six people were killed in clashes between the Black Axe and Eiye confraternities in a less than a week, including the son of a former council chairman who was reportedly also a cult member (18 Mar. 2010).

5. Treatment of Anti-cultists

In correspondence with the Research Directorate, a representative of the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) of Nigeria, a commission established by the Nigerian government (Nigeria n.d.a) that, among other activities, investigates complaints and provides conflict resolution services (ibid. n.d.b), indicated that the NHRC, which has not conducted "detailed" research on the Black Axe confraternity, has "limited" knowledge of this organization (5 Dec. 2012). However, according to the NHRC, the "observation of facts" indicates that [a]s a general rule, Black Axe and other cults do not engage in violent activities against those not involved in cult activities. They are however known to attack anti-cult campaigners through clandestine intimidation and physical attacks. (5 Dec. 2012)

Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

6. Black Axe Confraternity's Connection to Officials

Sources indicate that clashes between the Black Axe and Aiye confraternities in Benin City are related to the sharing of money that has been given to these cults by politicians (Leadership 27 July 2012; Vanguard 27 July 2012).

According to a January 2011 article by Vanguard, cultists have been recruited "as thugs" by politicians during primaries (24 Jan. 2011). Leadership newspaper indicates that cults are reportedly supported by people in "high places" such as security agencies (27 Oct. 2011).

7. State Protection

According to the National Universities Commission, the federal government has asked the heads of tertiary institutions to take measures to curb cult violence on campuses, including: sanctioning apprehended student cultists, conducting media sensitization campaigns, creating aggressive public campaigns and increasing advocacy efforts (Nigeria 22 Sept. 2008). Further information on whether this was implemented could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

Leadership indicates that, according to Nigerians living in Delta state, the federal government, the police, and traditional and religious institutions show a "lack of commitment in addressing the underlying causes of cult-related violence" (21 Feb. 2011).

According to the Vanguard, the Edo state Police Commissioner said that the federal government is "doing its best" to tackle the problem of cult violence in Edo state, "but there are areas that still need improvement" (Vanguard 24 Jan. 2011). The Edo state Police Commissioner reportedly also said that police are facing a shortage of patrol vehicles, adding that no divisional operational department has more than one police vehicle (ibid.).

This Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim for refugee protection. Please find below the list of sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

References


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Additional Sources Consulted

**Oral sources:** Attempts to contact the following representatives and organizations were unsuccessful within the time constraints of this Response: author of *Secret Cults in Nigeria’s Tertiary Institutions*; Human Rights and Justice Group...
Internet sites, including: Amnesty International; ecoi.net; The Jamestown Foundation; Minority Rights Group International; Nigeria – Federal Ministry of Education; United Nations – Integrated Regional Information Network, Refworld; United States Department of State.

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