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INTERNATIONAL SOS


Nigeria: Imo state: Anticipate heightened tensions in Orlu, Orsu following security operation

OVERVIEW

 Level:

 Location:

 Category:

 Active:

Advisory

Imo - Nigeria

Conflict, Police/security operation

18 Feb 2021 - 23 Feb 2021

Last Updated: 18 Feb 2021 21:10 (GMT)

The table below shows the number of impacted and potentially impacted individuals and assets at the date/time the alert was issued. The counts include individuals within the impact radius of the alert and may not reflect the total number of people in each area listed.

Please log into [Tracker](#) for the latest information or [click here](#) for an up-to-date list of affected individuals and assets in the impacted area.

EXPOSURE IN IMPACTED AREA ONLY

Location	There Now	There in next 24 hours	There in next 1-7 days	There while the alert is active
Benin City	0	0	1	1
Port Harcourt	2	4	2	5
TOTAL	2	4	3	6

EXPOSURE BY COUNTRY

Location	There Now	There in next 24 hours	There in next 1-7 days	There while the alert is active
Nigeria (High Risk)	18	20	20	30

Staff in [Orlu](#) and [Orsu](#) Local Government Areas (LGAs, both Imo state) **in the coming days** should expect heightened tensions following a military operation reportedly targeting the Eastern Security Network (ESN) paramilitary group on 17-18 February. The operation created panic in parts of the LGAs, with reports of airstrikes and shooting spreading online. The Nigerian military confirmed that helicopters and personnel were deployed as part of an intelligence mission, but claimed this did not result in any security incidents. Despite this, the deployment is likely to trigger further tensions in the area, and potential protests and clashes with the ESN.

MORE DETAIL

The operation follows earlier clashes in Orlu between the security forces and the ESN in late January. The violence lasted several days and resulted in at least ten fatalities. A curfew was subsequently imposed across Ideato North, Ideato South, Isu, Njaba, Nkwere, Nwangele, Orlu, Orsu, Oru East and Oru West LGAs (all Imo). Calm was restored after both ESN fighters and soldiers retreated from the area.

The ESN serves as the paramilitary wing of the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB), a separatist group that seeks to restore an independent state of Biafra in south-eastern Nigeria. It was created in December 2020 by Mazi Nnamdi Kanu with the task of providing security against bandits, particularly Fulani raiders, in the majority Igbo region of Nigeria. However, the Nigerian government sees the group as a threat to its authority and deployed the army to seek out and destroy its bases.

The region has long been a hotbed of Biafran separatist activity. Tensions between the federal government and the ethnic-Igbo population have been high ever since they first called for an independent Biafran nation. More than 1m people, mostly Igbos, died in a civil war which lasted from 1967-70.

ASSESSMENT

Precedent indicates that follow-up operations are likely over the coming days. ESN members are believed to be based mainly in forested areas, but the increased security presence in the LGAs could prompt a return of ESN members to the towns of Orlu and Orsu, on the pretence of defending the local population from harassment.

Representatives of the IPOB claimed the events are a declaration of war against the Igbo ethnic group in the area. Further similar statements are likely to heighten the risk of armed clashes between the ESN and the security forces. Curfews could be imposed on short notice.

WHAT WE ADVISED YOUR PEOPLE

Exercise caution in the coming days due to the potential for clashes and reprisal attacks. Liaise with local contacts and monitor local news sources to remain apprised of related developments. Avoid any associated gatherings as a precaution.

Curfews and traffic restrictions can be implemented at short notice during periods of increased tensions. Remain flexible when planning itineraries and follow all official directives. Carry relevant identification documents at all times to ease passage through spot-checks and checkpoints. Leave an area at the first sign of unrest. Move to a secure location, such as your accommodation or local office, and remain there until the situation has stabilised. Do not act on the basis on unconfirmed information. Monitor our Nigeria alerts for updates.

ASSISTANCE



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