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Policemen fire tear gas and arrest 22 people

after clash in Fanling leaves ten injured

200 SQUATTERS ATTACK POLICE

by Bo Tong

ABOUT 200 squatters in Fanling yesterday attacked policemen who were sent to evict them from a plot of private farmland.

Ten people, including a police inspector and two police constables, were injured in the clash at Onloktsuen.

Police had to fire tear gas into the squatter area before evicting the squatters.

Twenty-two people - 18 men and four women - were arrested.

They have been jointly charged with unlawful assembly and will appear at Fanling Magistracy today.

The incident happened at about 10 am when the police party, armed with a court order, tried to persuade the squatters to evacuate.

Angry squatters greeted the policemen with a shower of stones and bottles and allegedly assaulted the police with knives and other weapons.

Police fired 25 rounds of tear gas to subdue the attackers.

The Onloktsuen squatters claimed that they refused to leave because the owner of the land refused to compensate them or defer their eviction.

They claimed that they had been living there for more than 20 years.

The squatters said the owner of the land told them to move out at the beginning of this month.

On May 21, the Government told the squatters to leave the site and to demolish 13 structures, including their squat huts and farm buildings.

The squatters alleged that they sent representatives to negotiate with the land owner last Thursday and an agreement was reached.

They claimed that he agreed to delay their eviction by an extra 20 days and to pay \$60,000 in compensation.

However, they alleged that the land owner later denied that such an agreement was reached and insisted that they move out on Sunday.

The police said negotiations between the squatters and the land owner had been going on for the last five years.

But the squatters refused all offers made by the owner as well as the Government for temporary accommodation.

A police spokesman said tear gas was used because "it was the least harmful and violent means in an operation of such a nature."

He said any other form of force might have caused more severe injuries.

Eight of the injured, including the policemen were treated and discharged while two squatters, were admitted to Queen Elizabeth Hospital.