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Niger Delta Annual Conflict Report: January – December 2021

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There were significant changes in the Niger Delta peace and security landscape in 2021. These changes include an increase in lethal violence, driven by the outbreak of additional security and the emergence of new conflict actors. Diverse conflict risk factors contributed to the changing conflict and security dynamics during the period. These conflict risk factors include high tensions and the proliferation of armed groups (militant, criminal, and ethno-sectarian). This report examines the trends and patterns of conflict risk and lethal violence, and identifies key interrelated drivers and pressures on peace and stability at the regional, state and local levels. Data sources include ACLED (www.acleddata.com), Nigeria Watch (www.nigeriawatch.org) (<https://ciepdcwc.crowdmap.com>), IPDU SMS early warning system, and others.

According to data (www.p4p-nigerdelta.org), criminality and separatist agitation were the leading causes of conflict fatalities during the year. Criminality and separatist agitation increased 87% and 573% respectively in 2021 compared to 2020. In contrast, there was a drop in communal clashes and gang violence during the period. The most prevalent conflict and security issues in 2021 include kidnapping for ransom, robbery, clashes between rival cult gangs, herder/farmer clashes, and communal land/boundary disputes, violent separatist agitation, mob violence, violence, and targeted killing of women and girls for organ trafficking and ritualistic purposes.

Militancy/illegal oil bunkering related clashes, communal conflict, clashes between rival cult gangs, organized criminality and separatist agitation were the most lethal forms of violence in 2021 as measured by fatalities per incident. According to data (see second graph on page 4), on average, every incident of militancy/illegal oil bunkering related violence resulted in at least six fatalities. This was followed by communal violence and gang/cult clashes with an average of three and two fatalities per incident, respectively.

Overall, the most prevalent incidents of violence involved organized crime including kidnapping, robbery and killings for ritualistic purposes, with 845 fatalities in 408 reported incidents. This was followed by clashes/supremacy battles among rival cult gangs with 160 fatalities in 66 incidents. Communal violence was the third most prevalent conflict issue during the year. It caused more than 150 fatalities in 48 reported incidents, including farmer/herder clashes, land/boundary disputes, and leadership tussles.

Violent separatist agitation including targeted attacks on security facilities and personnel was also among the most reported forms of lethal violence during the year. Separatist agitation associated violence caused over 140 fatalities in more than 70 reported incidents, particularly in Imo, Abia, Rivers and Akwa Ibom State.

In addition, Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) including sexual violence was prevalent, especially in Akwa Ibom, Delta, Edo and Ondo State. Vigilante/mob violence was also prevalent particularly in Delta, Imo, Edo and Rivers, and it caused nearly 60 fatalities during the year.

There were changes in the geography of conflict in the Niger Delta in 2021, compared to 2020. According to data (www.p4p-nigerdelta.org), the most violent States during the period, based on the number of reported conflict fatalities, were Delta, Imo, Rivers, and Abia, respectively.

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