

Nigeria police 'killed suspects'

Amnesty International has accused the Nigerian police of summarily killing 12 suspected armed robbers captured in a police raid in Umuahia, Abia State.

The suspects had been paraded before the press the previous day.

Four others were shot dead in the raid.

Amnesty has called for a public inquiry into what happened.

In an unrelated incident, Niger Delta militants say 10 of their men were killed in a crackdown on kidnappers.

Police say they are investigating the deaths of the 12 in Umuahia and could not comment.

The men were arrested

earlier in August and paraded before journalists.

The police said those who had sustained injuries during the raid would be treated, and others were to be taken for interrogation.

The next day the bodies of all 12 were found dumped outside the government hospital morgue.

Local press said there was little local sympathy for the suspects given the huge number of armed robberies which had plagued the state.

Amnesty International says the accountability of the security services is a key issue, particularly with elections approaching and with the government's recent pledge to meet force with force when

dealing with armed groups in the Niger Delta.

On Monday, a militant group, the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta, said 10 of its fighters were killed in a fire-fight when their boats were ambushed by government forces on Sunday night.

Military sources confirmed the clash but gave no further details.

The group said it was trying to help hand over a Nigerian Shell oil worker, taken by gunmen almost two weeks ago, when they suddenly came under fire from 10 patrol boats.

The clash was the most serious to take place since the president announced his new tough

policy to tackle armed groups in the Delta.

The BBC's Alex Last in Lagos says the gun battle will only increase concerns, particularly among the oil companies, that a heavy-handed military approach could endanger the lives of the hostages still being held and escalate tensions in an already volatile region.

About 100 people were arrested last Friday in a large military raid on Port Harcourt.

So far this year, the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta has carried out a string of attacks on the oil industry, cutting Nigerian oil production by more than a quarter.