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Page last updated at 12:06 GMT, Monday, 16 March 2009

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Nigerian militants 'rape women'

A victim of a horrific attack in Nigeria's Niger Delta has described how gunmen raped pregnant women hijacked from two passenger boats.

The gunmen took at least five women from the boats to a camp deep in the creeks of the swampy oil region and brutally raped them, the military said.

The women were forced to lie down on the ground while the gunmen sang and danced around them, one victim said.

It is the first time that a Delta attack like this has been made public.

Two of the women were pregnant, a military spokesman said.

A security source says one of the women has since died of her injuries but this has not been independently confirmed.

The attack happened on Saturday after two passenger boats were hijacked on their way from Bonny Island to Port Harcourt the capital of Rivers State.

"They told us not to lift up our eyes. I began crying to God," a 30-year-old woman told the BBC.

Begged

The attackers put guns against the heads of the men in the boat and forced them to jump into the water.

Some begged the gunmen to drop them off on land as they couldn't swim.

Five of the passengers forced into the water are unaccounted for, a military spokesman said.

"They were ferocious and bloody, they took us away, and we heard they were taking us to their camp - when I heard that I thought I'd never come back," the woman told the BBC at the headquarters of the Joint Military Taskforce in charge of security in the Delta.

The men forced them onto the floor and danced around them before gang-raping them, she said.

Other women were taken to another camp where they were raped, according to military spokesman Lt Col Sagir Musa.

He said he did not know exactly how many women were raped by the gunmen, only that five had sought medical treatment after the attack on Saturday.

They refused to give details about how the women were rescued.

Kidnapping, robbery, hijacking and rape are common in Nigeria's



Gangs of jobless youth join gangs in the Niger Delta to make money

"They were ferocious and bloody, they took us away, and we heard they were taking us to their camp - when I heard that I thought I'd never come back"

30-year-old rape victim



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Niger Delta where years of poor government has led to a collapse in the rule of law.

But this attack is believed to be the first time so many women have been kidnapped and systematically raped after a passenger boat hijack.

Numerous armed groups roam the maze of mangrove swamps and creeks.

Jobless youths join the militant groups looking for money from kidnapping, extortion from multinational oil companies and oil theft.

Some like the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (Mend), a loose affiliation of militant gang leaders, claim they are fighting for a better deal from Nigeria's oil for the inhabitants of the Delta.

But analysts say most groups doing the kidnapping and robbing are not motivated by any political struggle, and are actually criminal gangs, known as "cults" who act as hired muscle for politicians, traditional leaders and oil thieves.

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