

Soldiers Invade Community, Shoot Two Cyclists

Over 60 armed Nigerian soldiers on Thursday night, August 25, 2006, burnt to ashes over 1,500 houses which accommodated about 3,000 inhabitants and shot two motorbike drivers at an over-crowded poor neighbourhood called Aker Base in the Rumuolumeni community in Obio/Akpor Local Government Area of Rivers State.

The ugly incident occurred at about 7.45pm, at a popular restaurant in Aker Base called CAROL BAR, a trendy place for relaxation in the area where expatriates and Nigerian oil workers chill out at the end of the day's work over bottles of cold beer and good music. The militants who were said to have been numbered about eight and amongst them were two girls all garbed in military uniforms, and wielding assault rifles and submachine guns, abducted an Italian oil worker, Mario Pavero attached to SAIPEM and shot dead a military commander called Cracker, who was in charge of the military personnel guarding the facilities of an Italian oil company, SAIPEM.

Eyewitnesses told CEHRD investigators that the militants shot dead the military officers when he saw the militants shooting sporadically in the area, and attempted to send out a distress radio message. He was not armed with guns neither was his junior officer who escaped with bullet wounds on his leg.

The militants took their hostage in their speedboat and spirited away through the complex mangrove creek courses of the delta unhurt. The soldiers who were attached to the SAIPEM, an Italian oil servicing company few metres away from a Naval Base never came out to confront the militants, rather they were peeping through some holes on their gate, to watch the militants drama.

CEHRD gathered that it was the same frightened Aker base residents who moved down to SAIPEM gate, to inform the soldiers that an Italian oil worker was taken hostage and "Cracker" shot dead. The soldiers there were enraged mainly over the "news" of the death of their commander (Cracker). The team which demolished the slum settlement was led by one Papa Abiyu, according to inhabitants of the destroyed settlement. On hearing the news of the death of the office, Papa Abiyu left for Bori Camp, a military cantonment in Port Harcourt, to mobilize other soldiers to burn Aker Base to ashes.

On their way to Aker Base after mobilizing for action, the invading soldiers (60) in number, reportedly shot 2 commercial motorcycle riders, popularly called Okada in Nigeria. CEHRD cannot confirm whether they are dead or not, but Aker Base insisted that the military did it. The soldiers later razed down the entire Aker Base to ashes. Mr Patrick Oghogho, a 29-year-old resident suffered a third degree burn.

CEHRD and US-based Human Rights Watch (HRW) officials visited him in a private hospital near the area.

Several others, especially children were said to have suffered similar fate. Poor Aker Base locals also alleged that when the Rivers State Fire Service having been informed of the burning settlements arrived at the scene to put off the fire, they were chased away by rampaging Nigerian soldiers who threatened to shoot the fire fighters. When the houses were burning, the soldiers, with their guns attempted to prevent the inhabitants from running out the burning houses..

CEHRD and HRW had issued reports separately calling on Nigerian government to institute an independent inquiry into the incident and compensate the victims immediately.

For more of CEHRD's report please visit (www.cehrd.org) and see the report (150 houses burnt and 3,000 rendered homeless in Nigeria Niger Delta).