

# Militants abduct Filipino in Owerri, kill police escort

EMMA OGU, Owerri with agency report

UNIDENTIFIED gunmen suspected to be Niger Delta militants yesterday

abducted a Filipino after killing a police escort and wounding his driver on the Sam Mbakwe International Airport road, Obiangwu near Owerri, Imo State.

The attack is significant because it is the first of such to be carried out in the South East zone especially Imo State since kidnapping started in the Niger Delta.

But *Daily Champion* learnt the expatriate whose name could not be ascertained at press time was on his way to the airport to board a flight when the militants on his

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trail opened fire at his car. The police escort in the car was said to have died on the spot, while the driver was critically injured.

The well armed youths reportedly carried the Filipino into their white Mercedes Benz car and drive off to unknown destination.

The body of the policeman believed to be from Rivers State, was said to have been deposited at the nearby cottage hospital where the wounded driver is also receiving treatment.

Report said the shooting lasted for several minutes, causing pandemonium. It was gathered that the Filipino was coming from Port Harcourt to the airport, unknown to him that he was being trailed by the gunmen who exploited the absence of security at the airport road to strike.

Following the incident, villagers and commercial motorcyclists who operate from the airport junction along Aba-Owerri road, deserted the area.

The state police command confirmed the incident but said that no one was killed.

Police public relations officer, Mr Isa Mohammed, told *Daily Champion* that the kidnappers trailed the Filipino from Port Harcourt and waylaid him at the airport road.

According to him, the gang, after kidnapping him, went back to Port Harcourt. "They did not touch his car; they only kidnapped him and went back to Port Harcourt with him", he added.

The latest kidnapping brings to 25 the number of Filipino workers being held by militant groups in the oil-rich Niger Delta creeks.

Port Harcourt airport has been closed since last August for maintenance, so people

# Militants

travelling to the city by air have to fly to Owerri in Imo State and drive another two or three hours to get to Port Harcourt.

Foreigners driving from Owerri to Port Harcourt often take armed police escorts for protection.

As well as the 25 Filipino hostages, two Italians, a Briton, an American and a Lebanese are being held by militant groups fighting for greater local control of the oil which comes from the region.

On Sunday, nine Chinese workers were released after spending 11 days in captivity.

The seizing of the 24 Filipinos on 20 January prompted Philippine President Gloria Arroyo to bar Filipino workers travelling to Nigeria for employment.

Last week, some militant groups in oil-rich region warned that unless their jailed leaders were released abduction of foreigners would continue.

Most abductions are resolved by the payment of ransoms that are often denied, a trend that has given rise to copy-cat abductions as kidnappers have made money from them.

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Ladoja to nominate at least three elders in the State, one each from the three senatorial districts, to reconcile all the aggrieved parties saying this is the only way out.

Governor Ladoja who had earlier appeared before the House of Representatives peace panel disclosed that his failure to share one-third of his security vote with Alhaji Adedibu three months into his