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FG urged to probe killing of 25 Ijaw youths

Niger Delta Reconciliation Council (NDRC) has called on the Federal Government to probe the alleged unprofessional killing of 25 Ijaw youths by troops of the Joint Task Force during the invasion of Ogboinbiri flow station of Nigerian Agip Oil Company last month.

A statement by the NDRC yesterday in Warri, Delta State, described the killing of the youths as "extra-judicial" killing and called for immediate probe.

It accused the JTF soldiers of behaving unprofessionally by opening fire on the youths on June 17 and 21, knowing that the youths had already surrendered and waiting to be taken by the soldiers and treated as prisoners of war.

It added that though NDRC did not encourage hostage taking, it condemned in totality the act of extra-judicial killing which it said would further increase hostility in the region.

"Without encouraging hostage taking, we condemn and call for probe of the recent unconscionable extra-judicial execution by the Joint Military Task Force (JTF) in the first encounter despite surrender of 10 Ijaw youths in alleged kidnap mission to the Ogboinbiri Agip Flow Station in Bayelsa State .

"We are shocked that Brig-Gen. Lawrence Ngubane who is obviously not in control of his loose troops in a democracy reportedly boasts about his JTF's unprofessional conduct when the youths should rationally have been handed over to appropriate authorities as "prisoners of war" for trial," it said.

NDRC's President, Comrade Ramson Erebo and Secretary, Prince Oweilayefa Ekrika, said the action of the JTF troops at Ogboinbiri betrayed the present position of the Federal Government on reconciliation and peace in the region, and blamed the wrong advice on the commander of the Task Force who it said ill -advised the President on the situation.

The organization accused JTF's Commander, Brig. Gen. Lawrence Ngubane, of having misled President Umaru Yar'adua into issuing the order for soldiers to storm the facility.

It noted that such perceived careless killing of Ijaw youths by soldiers have the capability of escalating fresh crisis in the zone and implored the president to get to the root of the matter and ensure that the dead youths get justice.

"With rising death toll of the people, it is an insult on the psyche of the Ijaw nation for the JTF to deny application of maximum force when it is always fatal bashes in several encounters. Sadly, the ongoing peace and reconciliation process to which our organization is involved and Mr. President is avowedly committed, cannot be helped by insincerity and thrust of physical force by the JTF, but by dialogue and enlightened crisis management," the statement added.

It said the only solution to the Niger Delta crises was dialogue and not the use of military might and violence as those involved were still Nigerians asking for a better deal from its resources.

Nevertheless, NDRC applauded the release of Alhaji Mujaheed Asari Dokubo (Leader of the Niger Delta Peoples Volunteer Force) and urged all freedom fighters to cease-fire to create enabling environment for the present administration to fulfill its promise to the impoverished people of the region.

Similarly, the group described the death of the Ijaw youths at Ogboinbiri as one "story too many" and urged oil companies operating in the region to change their attitude and urgently open windows of employment for the youths in the interest of reconciliation and sustainable peace in the Niger Delta.

It commended the government for the appointment of Dr. Timi Alaibe as the substantive Managing director of the NDDC and also called for the confirmation of Dr. Aginighan as the director of finance and administration of the commission.

It said the duo could work effectively with the governors of Rivers, Bayelsa and Delta state to bring peace and the desired development to the region.

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