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Countryman

EFCC: I WILL STEP ON TOES
— MRS WAZIRI



THAT MEANS YOU MAY
PROCEED TO SCHOOL
VERY SOON

Militants, soldiers in shoot-out

•We killed 22 soldiers —MEND

•Only 1 was injured —JTF

TONY ITA ETIM, Port Harcourt

Govement for the Emancipation of Niger Delta, (MEND), yesterday claimed it carried out an attack on oil facilities in Rivers State, and killed 22 soldiers in the process. It also said it has declared an oil war in the region following an alleged attack by the Joint Task Force, Operation flush Out 111 in the state.

This was contained in a press statement signed by MEND's spokesman, Jomo Gbomo.

It read in part: "Following a previous warning that any attack on our positions will be tantamount to a declaration of an oil war, the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) has declared an oil war in response to the unprovoked aerial and marine attacks on a MEND position in Rivers state of Nigeria on September 13, 2008 by the armed forces of Nigeria.

"About 0100 Hrs, today, September 14, 2008, Hurricane Barbarossa commenced with heavily armed fighters in hundreds of war boats filing out from different MEND bases across the Niger Delta in solidarity to carry out destructive and deadly attacks on the oil industry in Rivers state.

"By dawn, destroyed oil flow stations, gun boats, burst pipelines, dead and injured soldiers trailed in the aftermath of the 'hurricane'. Some specific locations include the Soku Gas Plant, Chevron Platform at Kula; over 22 well armed soldiers sent as reinforcement were intercepted, killed and dispossessed of their weapons, a major crude trunk pipeline at Nembe creek was blown up at several points.

"The operation will continue until the government of Nigeria appreciates that the solution to peace in the Niger Delta is justice, respect and dialogue. This military style bullying belongs to the past 50 years when the Niger Delta people responded only with their mouths, pens and placards.

"All international oil and gas loading vessels entering the region are warned to drop anchor in the high sea or divert elsewhere until further notice. Failure to comply is taking a foolhardy risk of attack and destruction of the vessel.

"Again, we are asking that oil companies evacuate their staff from their field facilities because the brief is not to capture hostages but to bring these structures to the ground.

Gbomo on Saturday said that "MEND fighters have suffered about three casualties and RPG's were fired on two army attack helicopters that came at close range.

He recalled that on "September 13, 2008, the armed forces of Nigeria began a full scale aerial and marine offensive on the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger

Delta (MEND) positions and neighboring Ijaw communities in Rivers state with helicopter gunship, jet fighters and over 20 gun boats and landing crafts filled with heavily armed soldiers mainly from the northern axis of Nigeria.

"We hold the governor of Rivers state and the president of Nigeria accountable for the genocide on the defenseless civilians who are bearing the brunt from indiscriminate airforce bombs."

In a similar statement weekend, Gbomo has threatened that "All MEND positions in the Niger delta will respond to this unprovoked attack coming at a time the government is canvassing the so-called Niger Delta Ministry to hoodwink the people."

Gbomo insisted that, "Rotimi Amaechi, the governor of Rivers state must realize that this action also puts his family and community at the risk of reprisals with dire consequences."

The militant group continued: "Oil companies are warned to move out their workers within the next 24 hours because a hurricane is about to sweep through oil installations in the entire Niger Delta region."

In a related development, Gbomo disclosed that "the 27 oil workers rescued yesterday by MEND from the pirates that kidnapped them from the MT Blue Ocean and taken to the camp under attack to be offered as reward leverage for the release of Henry Okah are trapped in the fighting between our fighters and the Nigerian military forces.

"The workers are made up of five expatriates from Britain, South Africa and Ukraine, while the remaining twenty two are Nigerians.

"It was learnt that the military on faulty intelligence as usual embarked on what is now a botched rescue attempt.

"Some of the oil workers are injured but are being treated with the same local herbs we are using in treating our wounded. The Red Cross or doctors from MSF should be allowed passage to attend to them. Injuries are mainly from high caliber machine guns and shrapnel."

Mend alleged Elem Tombia and Ogboma communities in Degema "have been razed to the ground by the rampaging soldiers who have not been able to take our positions. Civilian casualties are high."

"We suspect one of them may have been damaged. The helicopters were repelled and have not returned. No news of enemy casualties. Fierce fighting is still going on with MEND fighters adopting guerrilla tactics.

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