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**Nigeria: Bomb Blasts Kill 12 in Abuja, 8 Injured**

Achilleus-Chud Uchegbu, Malachy Uzendu, Tony Ailemen, Erasmus Alaneme And Onyinyechi Nwangwu

2 October 2010

Abuja — High expectation with which Nigerians and hundreds of foreigners thronged the Eagle Square in Abuja yesterday to mark the Golden Jubilee of the nation's independence was marred when explosives planted by the Movement for the Emancipation of Niger Delta (MEND) went off, killing no fewer than 12 persons and injuring eight.

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agents in the security circles".

The terse statement from the spokesman of MEND, Jomo Gbomo warned of sporadic explosions 30 minutes after President Goodluck Jonathan was officially scheduled to arrive at the venue of the commemorative event as advertised on the programme.

The terse statement reads: "With due respect to all invited guests, dignitaries and attendees of the 50th Independence Anniversary of Nigeria being held today, Friday, October 1, 2010 at the Eagle Square, Abuja, the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) is asking everyone to begin immediate evacuation of the entire area within the next 30 minutes.

"This warning expires after 10.30Hrs. Several explosive devices have been successfully planted in and around the venue by our operatives working inside the government security services.

"In evacuating the area, keep a safe distance from vehicles and trash bins. There is nothing worth celebrating after 50 years of failure.

"For 50 years, the people of the Niger Delta have had their land and resources stolen from them.

"The constitution before independence which offered resource control was mutilated by illegal military governments and this injustice is yet to be addressed,"

Even as the explosion sent fears down the spines of hundreds of people who had gathered to physically watch the splendid displays packaged by government to celebrate the event, a minor explosion also occurred at the Eagle Square itself, from one of the policemen detailed to participate in the march-past, but there was no casualty in the incident.

MEND had earlier in the day circulated messages to media houses warning people to stay away from the Eagle Square and adjourning places as they had successfully planted bombs in and around Eagle Square, using "our

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Jomo Gbomo stated.

The explosion occurred at a place considered by analysts as not being too palatable given its proximity to the Eagle Square and the Transcorp Hilton Hotel, where most of the foreign dignitaries are accommodated.

Journalists who rushed to the scene of the explosion which took place directly opposite Izon Wari House, belonging to the President's home state of Bayelsa along the Shehu Shagari Way, saw over seven vehicles burnt while over 20 others that got damaged, leaving over eight persons injured.

The blast occurred at 12.15 pm, same time the parade ceremonies were going on at the Eagle Square. The fly-offs from the explosion shattered the glasses of the adjoining Arcade Hotel, which is also about 800 metres from the Transcorp Hilton Hotel.

According to a source who claimed to have witnessed the explosion, the object which caused the havoc, may have been planted in one of the vehicles that was damaged by the blasts.

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As at 2.30 pm, newly promoted Deputy Inspector-General of Police (DIG) in-charge of zone 7, Mrs. Ivy Okoronkwo along with the Commissioner of Police (CP) for the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) Abuja, John Haruna, other policemen, men of the Road Safety Corps, Fire Service, Civil Defence Corps and National Emergency Management Agency, (NEMA) all rushed to the place, while men of the Police Anti-Bomb Unit, were busy screening the place.

Several other persons who sustained serious injuries from both the blasts and the consequent stampede were

immediately rushed to the State House Clinic, National Hospital and Julius Berger Hospital at Jabi.

Along the Shehu Shagari Road, there were blood stains.

People who were at the nearby Millennium Park Garden having fun had to scamper to safety as they were shocked on hearing the sounds of the bomb blasts. Many of them rushed to Gana street in Maitama District, while the rest went home.

Our reporters gathered that the bomb blast went off just two minutes after the Senegalese President, Abdul Wade drove past the place to Eagle Square for the function.

Confirming the explosions, the Force Public Relations Officer (FPRO), Assistant Commissioner of Police (ACP) Emmanuel Ojukwu, said seven people were confirmed dead, three people injured, while two vehicles were completely burnt beyond recognition.

Though he would not want to speak further on the matter, he explained that the injured persons have been rushed to nearby hospitals for medical treatment while the dead had been removed to the mortuary and the scene cordoned off for forensic analysis and investigation.

The other explosion which occurred right inside the Eagle Square was minor, though it caused little stampede, it was immediately contained as eagle-eyed security operatives detailed to provide security at the place swiftly rushed to the place and promptly arrested and whisked off the policeman to Guards Brigade for "detailed interrogation and screening".

Meanwhile, the major activities marking the Independence anniversary took off on a colourful note with the entry of President Jonathan at exactly 10.50 a.m. He immediately moved round the arena exchanging greetings with the enthusiastic audience.

But contrary to expectation, Presidents of top world nations shunned the ceremonies, leaving only second rated countries to attend the occasion officially.

The group of industrialized Western, countries and the United States of America were not represented.

Even at that, United Arab Emirate, South Africa, Sudan and the Vatican, were represented

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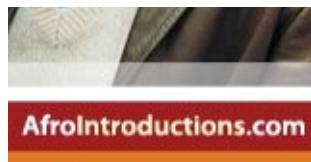
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However, the Presidents of Cameroun, Gabon, Gunea, Gunea Bissau, Liberia, Saharawi Arab Republic, Senegal, Sierra Leone and Togo, graced the occasion.

Shortly after the Master of Ceremonies introduced the sequence of events on the programme, there was brief but heavy down pour which did not disrupt the attendant ceremonies.

After the military and police ceremonial and colour parade, para-military and school children drawn from several primary and secondary schools in Abuja took part in the march past followed by beautiful callisthenics displays.

The climax of the event commenced when the military gallantly displayed its arsenal/equipment and carried out aerial display to the admiration of everybody.

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