

Women join vigilante groups in Aleita

By Idris Ahmed
& Andrew Walker

The fear of rape has spurred women to join vigilante groups in a village scheduled to be demolished along airport road, *City News* has learned.

Aleita has been terrorised by a series of armed robberies since the village was marked for demolition, residents said.

Stories circulating about two women brutally raped in recent days have prompted women to take part in what is normally considered men's duty.

Janet Oyeade, a 42-year-old school teacher who lives in the waterfront area of the village, said: "I decided to join the vigilantes because my husband works far away, and it is not safe for a woman to sleep here alone. We have not slept in two weeks."

At the weekend, she and other women in the village participated in the all night vigil.

Participants said they were not armed, but the men banged drums and blew whistles to scare away robbers. There are about ten female members of the waterfront group.

Mrs Oyeade, who has five children, said: "We have no protection, other than what God gives us. But we have to come out and protect ourselves."

City News heard reports of two women raped in the village. The first was two weeks ago when a woman, who had just given birth days before, was raped by robbers before they killed her.

The second woman, according to residents, was pregnant.

Virtually every person *City News* spoke to had heard of the story. But whenever reporters got to houses that people said the women lived in, neighbours said they heard it happened elsewhere. Reporters could not track down anyone who knew the victims personally, or verify the stories through other means.

But the threat of armed robbery is enough to spur women into taking direct action.

Taiwo Adejumo, 41, a

trader with one child, said: "We burn tyres and bang drums and the men blow their whistles all night. We hope that the robbers hear we are awake and do not come here."

The residents do not yet know when the demolition will start. Most are taking part of their houses and selling the materials in preparation for moving to Gwagwalada, 52 kms away from the city.

Mrs Oyeade says when the bulldozers come, she might move into the primary school she teaches in. She said: "I have already packed my household together. Hopefully they will not demolish the school because it is a government building."

She moved to the waterfront area of Aleita five years ago with her husband. They built their own house.

Mrs Adejumo said: "Robbery is on a daily basis here. It has got much worse since the demolitions started. We hear stories about women being raped; we want to protect ourselves, because no one else can."