



## Nigeria: River Niger Dredging Stalls As Militants Killed Four Soldiers, Three Others

BY SHEHU ABUBAKAR, 10 MARCH 2013

Patani — The killing of four Soldiers, a retired Naval officer and two civilians by unknown gunmen suspected to be Niger Delta militants around Patani near Bifurcation in Delta state has stalled the dredging of LOT 1 of the river Niger covering Bifurcation to Warri, General Manager Project Admin of the company dredging that side of the river, Fung Tai Engineering company, Mr. Goodluck Chinaka has said.

Chinaka, who was speaking exclusively to Sunday Trust said the militants attacked an oil Barge belonging to Sterling oil killing the four Soldiers escorting, a retired navy officer and two civilians on board about 200 meters away from Fung Tai camp in Patani that forced his company to suspend the dredging of the river Niger for about a month while Soldiers from the Joint Taskforce (JTF) combed the area.

The militants who were in speed boats were reported to have attacked the Barge by opening fire at it thereby scaring everybody that was around the place before ransacking the Barge. It was not clear if items were stolen from the oil Barge or not.

"We do not really know the cause of that attack but of late there have been series of attacks; river robbery, attacking even market women. That which happened to Sterling oil was the climax of it where some people were actually killed. That attack took place about 200 meters away from our camp, right inside our channel. As a result of that, the JTF had to go in and were combing the whole place and asked us to stop work. We stopped work for about one month and have just resumed. There was tension all over the place. We have started working, the Sterling oil have also started work. But we are all operating with fear.

"What we know is that we tried to find out what really informed that attack. But like I said also, there have been series of river robbery attacks, community agitations, and community demands and when you do not meet up with such demands, nobody wants to know whether you are dredging river Niger. Once you are working for government, you must provide all that they need. So, when you are not able to meet up with what they are demanding, what will follow next is attack. Is either they come to you threatening that they will sink the dredger, attacking your personnel and all of that. We have been managing such situation and that is exactly what it is," he said.

Also commenting, the Chief operating officer of Fung Tai, Mr. Brian Drohan, an Irish national said he kept away from the dredging site since the attack on the oil Barge took place, adding that Fung Tai is very mindful with the security of its workers. He urged government to beef up security within the area because it is possible that there could be un-provoked attacks even though they are engaged with the local community.

Managing Director of the National Inland Waterways Authority (NIWA), Architech Ahmed Aminu Yar'adua said the company that dredged LOT 2 covering Bifurcation to Onitsha Bridge has completed the second year maintenance dredging adding that work is going on at the four other LOTS. He was very optimistic that the full length of the lower river Niger will be fully dredged before the June dateline given to the dredgers.

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