


NEWS

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Gunmen kidnap Bayelsa Speaker's mother

- Shoot American Professor, kill oil worker
From Willie Etim (Yenagoa) and Kelvin Ebiri (Port Harcourt)

THE spate of violence and allied crimes has continued in the Niger Delta region with the kidnap of the Bayelsa Speaker's mother, Mrs. Amsa Seibarugu, late on Tuesday. And yesterday, a visiting American professor was shot while another oil worker was killed outright.

The Bayelsa Governor, Chief Timipre Sylva, has condemned the kidnap and vowed to find the woman and punish the culprits.

Sylva who spoke with the Speaker, Wenipre Seibarugu, a few minutes after the news of the kidnap broke, promised to throw the weight of government behind efforts by the security agents to find the abducted mother.

His words: "My Honourable Speaker, I want you to be strong in this time of trial. We share your pain and I can assure you that I will use all the resources available to me to help find your mother and bring these criminals to justice."

According to him, government has initiated a proactive strategy to rid the state of

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hostage-takers, adding the results would be obvious within a few months.

The governor expressed regrets that the actions of a few criminal elements in the society were damaging the economy of the state as well as the sense of security of its people and business community.

"My administration shall run a zero tolerance policy against kidnappers in Bayelsa State ", the governor declared.

Meanwhile, security operatives have begun moves to ensure the safe return of the Speaker's mother.

In a related development, gunmen yesterday invaded a Port Harcourt-based newspapers office and shot a visiting American university don, Professor Michael Watts. In a separate incident in the Ogbunabal area of the city, gunmen also shot dead an oil worker at his house.

Watts, a British citizen, teaches at Berkeley University. He is also a member of the Washington-based study group, the Center for International Policy (IPC). He is an expert on oil-related violence in the Niger Delta.

The British High Commission in Nigeria recently issued a travel alert predicated on the fact of "the high-risk of kidnapping, armed robbery and other armed attacks" in Rivers, Bayelsa and Delta states

The Managing Editor of the Port Harcourt-based National Point, Ibiba Don-Pedro, told The Guardian that about 10 gunmen invaded her office shortly after Watts

entered the premises.

The attackers who were suspected to be armed robbers, according to Don-Pedro, might have trailed the university don from a bank along Olu Obasanjo Road, where he had earlier gone for financial transaction.

"We were discussing the general situation in the country when suddenly I heard gunshots. I decided to go out and find out what was the cause. Immediately I got out, I saw over six armed men, shouting 'where is the white man, where is the white man.'

"The gunmen who had early shot the security guard who tried to prevent them from entering the premises, used bullets to force open most of the offices before getting Watts."

Don-Pedro explained that immediately the gunmen spotted the university don, one of them tried to shoot him in the leg but the bullet missed and struck him in the hand. Not done, the gunmen pounced on him before dispossessing him of some hard currencies.

She said: "The robbers shot at all the doors just to gain access into the rooms. When they got to where Professor Watts was waiting, they shot and kicked him. Blood was gushing from his hand and head. It was a terrible thing. This is what Port Harcourt has turned to. It is unfortunate."

The gunmen reportedly stole all the laptops and other valuable items that caught their fancy from the newspaper office.

Shortly after the gunmen left, both the

university don and the guard were rushed to a private clinic in Port Harcourt for medical treatment.

The oil worker victim, Mr. Elder Echendu, was said to be returning home from work when the gunmen accosted him and ordered him to hand over the keys of his car to them. They later shot him and dragged his corpse out of the car before escaping with it.

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