

# Gunmen Kill 20 In Rivers

FROM  
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(ABUJA), KELVIN EBIRI,  
(PORT HARCOURT) AND  
WOLE SADARE (LAGOS)

**F**OLLOWING worsening security situation in Rivers State, President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua yesterday dispatched the Chief of Defence Staff,

**...Gangsters Cripple Business Activities, Social Life**

FROM  
ROSEANN CHIKEREUBA,  
PORT HARCOURT

**C**ONTINUED sporadic shootings in the major streets have crippled business activities in the Rivers State capital, Port Harcourt. The fierce shootings, which heightened a week ago, have forced residents to remain indoors, to avoid being hit by stray bullets.

The ever-busy Ikwerre and Aba roads, which usually experienced heavy traffic jams, now witness light flow of traffic.

Lamenting the situation, traders in Mile One market told *The Guardian* that the erratic gun shots in the city, especially in Ikwerre Road, had scared their customers away, thereby crippling their businesses.

Mr. Nwabueze Dike, a

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- President Orders Army Chief, IG To Port Harcourt
- Criminals On The Loose, Says Senate President

Gen. Andrew Owoye Azazi and the Acting Inspector-General of Police, Mr. Mike Okiro to Port Harcourt: Fierce fighting between

two armed groups had claimed no fewer than

them four policemen, at the weekend.

were to take direct control of the security in

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20 persons, among

The security chiefs

the oil-rich city, where

gangs of bandits have been on the prowl for five days, killing many and forcing residents to stay indoors.

Sources said that the

President described the situation in Port Harcourt as unacceptable and directed General Azazi and Okiro to proceed to the city immediately.

The sources added that the President pointedly told the security topshots: "Go

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The premises of the Rivers State Radio 2 station destroyed by the gangsters... yesterday Inset: The Port Harcourt NNPC megastation... also destroyed

PHOTOS: KELVIN EBIRI

# Violence Claims 20 In Rivers

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to Port Harcourt and bring down the violence immediately. And also resolve all the issues precipitating the violence."

The security chiefs returned to Abuja yesterday evening to report back to the President on their assessment of the situation.

Senate President, David Bonaventure Mark, also yesterday decried the situation in Rivers, even as he denied plans to declare a state of emergency in the state.

President Yar'Adua's directive followed a top-level security meeting held on Friday evening at the Presidential Villa, Abuja.

Chaired by the President, the meeting had in attendance Vice President Goodluck Jonathan; Secretary to the Government of the Federation (SGF), Ambassador Babagana Kingibe; the Chief of Defence Staff, Service Chiefs and Inspector-General of Police.

Also in attendance was the new Director-General of the State Security Services (SSS), Mr. Afakriya A. Gadzama.

Both the security and defence chiefs arrived in Port Harcourt aboard a presidential jet and held a meeting with the state governor, Celestine Omehia.

At the meeting were the Brigade Commander, 2nd Amphibious Brigade, Brigadier General Samuel Sanusi; the Rivers State Commissioner of

Police, Felix Ogbandu; the state Director of the State Security Services (SSS) and other top military officers drawn from the Navy and Airforce.

They later gave assurance that the Joint Task Force in the state would immediately commence a major crackdown on hoodlums that had created the atmosphere of lawlessness in Port Harcourt in the past one week.

Residents of old Port Harcourt Township told *The Guardian* that armed bandits, who were dressed in police uniforms, stormed the area at about 3.30am, shooting and detonating explosives suspected to be dynamites. The shooting continued till yesterday afternoon.

The armed men, suspected to be from the Ateke Tom faction, attacked the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) Mega Station at Lagos Bus stop and the state-owned Radio Rivers 2 on Degema Street, where they used dynamites to destroy substantial part of the building. A security guard was killed at a house near the radio station.

A source at the 2nd Brigade of the Nigerian Army, Port Harcourt, said a reinforcement of soldiers were sent at about 4am to beef up security around the Government House, to prevent it from being attacked by the gunmen.

The soldiers mounted roadblocks and cordoned off the junction leading to Industry Road, through Azikiwe Road as well Forces Avenue.

And as the bandits were retreating from the old township area, they ran into the troops and engaged them in a gun duel.

Some of them were reportedly killed while others abandoned a Carina Toyota car loaded with arms and ammunition and escaped with the bodies of their colleagues.

The JTF Commander in the state, Brigadier-General Sanusi, showed, to journalists, one recovered AK47 rifle, arms and ammunition and some posters of a former member of the Rivers State House of Assembly found inside the car.

Incidence of gunshots was also reported in areas like Rumuola, Waterlines and Eleme junction and Trans-Amadi, where the gunmen killed three policemen guarding an oil company.

Another policeman was reportedly shot dead at Garrison, on the busy Aba Road.

Meanwhile, a helicopter gunship was seen flying around the city.

A source at the Braithwaite Memorial Hospital said that no fewer than 20 bullet-riddled bodies were brought to the hospital yesterday.

Some of the victims were said to be returning from a church service and were caught in the crossfire. A source at the Doctors Without Borders-run clinic in Port Harcourt, said about 25 people with gunshot wounds were treated.

Okoro later told journalists at the JTF headquarters that they were

in Port Harcourt to assess the security situation and map out strategies on how best to curb the unrest.

The Police chief disclosed that the JTF had drawn up strategy to tackle the menace of gangsterism.

On calls by contributors to a radio programme for a state of emergency, Okoro said the situation on ground did not warrant such decision, adding that security agencies were in full control of the situation.

"We met the Governor and we discussed the security situation," he said. "The mere fact that we are here, you should know that the Federal Government has taken action."

"We have got our report of how the arms are coming in. When we deal with the hoodlums, we will get the arms from them."

Mark assured Nigerians that the various interest groups perceived to have solutions to the bizarre killings in the state were being consulted.

He made this known while speaking to journalists at the Presidential Wing of the Murtala Muhammed Airport, Lagos.

Mark said the Senate was well aware that criminality has set into the agitation for resource control, and promised that the matter was being handled with care.

"We're not declaring any state of emergency. We believe the violence will not continue. We want everyone to come to the table and dialogue. That's the way forward," he said.