

Militants kill Colombian, abduct two expatriates in Rivers

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MILITANTS who camouflaged as soldiers invaded an Italian oil firm, Saipem, at Aker Base-Rumuolumeni, near Port Harcourt, Rivers State yesterday. They shot dead a Colombian and kidnapped two other expatriate employees of the firm, a Colombian and a Filipino.

The attack came barely four days after the Jomo Gbomo faction of the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) threatened to resume attacks on oil installations and kidnap foreigners in the Niger Delta following the arrest of its leader and spokesperson, Henry Okah, by Angolan authorities.

Just yesterday, Vice President Goodluck Jonathan assured all investors in the Niger Delta that the Federal Government was working with all stakeholders towards making the region conducive for their

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issued in Gbomo's name last Sunday said "with effect from midnight today, Sunday, September 23, 2007, we will commence attacks on installations and abduction of expatriates."

"There will be no fore-warning of these attacks..."

Saipem's parent company, Eni, yesterday confirmed the attack.

The firm on its web-site yesterday confirmed that one worker, a Colombian, was wounded and died shortly after being taken to hospital while two others, a Colombian and a Filipino, were missing.

Also, the Minister of State for Defence, Mrs. Fidelia Akuabata Njeze, urged the militants in the Niger Delta to give the administration of President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua a chance to fulfill

its promises, describing as "unpatriotic" the threat by some sections of the militants to resume hostilities.

While receiving a delegation of Saipem Corporate Management led by the Executive Vice President in charge of off-shore business unit, Mr. Pietro Varone, at the Presidential Villa, Abuja, Jonathan decried the state of the oil rich region, saying: "The situation now is not what it used to be. The Niger Delta must return to what it used to be."

He assured foreign investors and oil firms of government's protection in their operations in the region.

Earlier, Varone said that his company, being a major stakeholder in Nigeria's oil and gas industry, was the first on-shore drilling firm in

Nigeria with over 40 years of experience.

He reiterated the commitment of the group towards the development of major oil and gas projects in the Niger Delta region, stressing that his firm had capacity to deliver.

He also expressed Saipem's commitment to the training of skilled people in the Niger Delta while acknowledging that it was a privilege to be part of development in the area.

Mrs. Njeze told journalists yesterday that "it is sad that our brothers in the Niger Delta region have bluntly refused to take the olive branch this administration is extending to them. This government has never denied the fact that this region has been neglected in the past but it has also

demonstrated enough political will that it is not going to be business as usual. So, I think it's only fair that this government be given a chance."

She lamented that the innocent citizens in the region were the ones affected most by the activities of the militants.

The minister said that President Yar'Adua's pledge to honour government's funding obligations to the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) as stipulated in the NDDC Act and additional directive for the release of the arrears of funds due to the commission, were enough to convince the militants that the government was on the right track in addressing the problems of the traumatised Niger Delta region.

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