

Rivers Community Accuses JTF Of Sacking Villages, Killing Indigenes

From Kelvin Ebiri,
Portharcourt

THE Tombia Council of Chiefs in Rivers State have petitioned the Presidency and the National Assembly, requesting for investigation into alleged destruction of their

seven villages and killing of over 30 persons by the Joint Military Task Force (JTF) last Saturday.

And in furtherance of its declared oil war said to have been occasioned by the JTF's attacks on Tombia communities, the Movement for the Emancipation of the

Niger Delta (MEND) has again used high explosives to destroy another major pipeline belonging to Shell Petroleum Development Company (SPDC) at the Elem-Kalabari Cawthorne Channel axis in the state.

Already hundreds of

Tombia residents have fled the community, following speculation that the JTF was planning further attacks in the area.

The attack on seven Tombia communities, namely Elem-Tombia, Ogboma, Elem-Bekinkiri, Oloko, Iyalla-

Ama, Alapuminjibiri and Mbiakafimimo last Saturday by the JTF triggered off the recent spate of attacks on oil installation by MEND.

In the petition endorsed by the chairman of the Council and the Secretary, Chief Lucas Aluye-Benibo and

Chief Daye Ikiroma-Owiye, they said the people of Tombia now live in perpetual fear because of what appears to be a concerted plan for systematic extermination of their people.

The chiefs explained

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that last Saturday, 20 JTF gunboats, two helicopter gunships and several outboard engine boats were deployed in the affected communities for the operations. During the raid, the indigenes alleged, over 30 persons were feared dead, while many houses were razed and property looted.

According to them, "the

river is now full of corpses which cannot be picked up for burial by their concerned relations for fear of being attacked by the JTF."

The chiefs described JTF's claim that militants in the area opened fire at them as preposterous, insisting that the affected communities were mainly occupied by fishermen and women, with their children, most of whom

were killed during the aerial and marine attacks by the military.

"If the Nigerian security forces are in search of Niger Delta militants, whose activities are equally a cause of fear for the civil society anywhere, they are not to kill and maim the members of the civil society they are expected to protect," the Tombia leaders said.

"Rumour is rife from the

military quarters that the next place of attack by the JTF would be the Tombia town and its settlements. Our people have started running away from the communities for fear of being killed by the Nigerian security forces," they said.

The chiefs prayed for the intervention of the presidency and the National Assembly to save their lives and property.