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THE GUARDIAN

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Pirates kill eight trawler captains*By Odit Sunday with agency report*

DESPITE repeated assurance from the Navy to make the Nigerian waters free from the activities of sea pirates, the sea robbers continue to operate without molestation while death in their hands continue to be on the increase.

In fact the Navy appears to have gone to bed and they only wake in the afternoon to operate on land where the wild ones among them have been terrorising innocent civilians when they are supposed to be on the waters to meet face to face with the sea pirates that have infested the Nigerian waters making them unsafe for fishing and navigational activities. But the same Nigerian Navy has since attributed its inadequacy to lack of platforms.

President of the Merchant Navy Senior Staff Association of Nigeria, Captain Thomas Keremerigha said that the Nigeria Navy would have to be adequate in order to take the battle to the door steps of the pirates.

"There was piracy conference in Abuja, so many things were said at the end of the day nothing came out. Just last week, we had an attack on fishing Trawler, Star 1 belonging to one of the vessels owners in this country, a captain was killed, he is still in the mortuary. A lot of crew were equally injured. I think government really has to come out and do something tangible to curb this because a lot of more serious things are bound to equally happen after this. If the Navy could come out to tell the whole world that they could not match the pirates because of platform, it means the custodians of the territorial waters have given up hope." He said that no fewer than about 10 ship captains had been killed in recent times.

He lamented, "here is an industry that is not only employing Nigerians, but it is equally earning foreign exchange for this nation, yet, the cost of sailing a vessel for 45 days is very high because of the high price of diesel. If the government wants to kill the industry, let them kill it and increase the unemployment rate. To sail a vessel for 45 days would cost you about N9 million.

"What would you get from the sea that you would sell and get your money back, you are paying the crew, you are feeding them, you are buying water. At the end of the day pirates will attack you at sea, loot all you cargo and your electronics and kill your crew."

Voice of America which also reported the recent increase in piracy attack on Nigerian waters said that the pirates attacked at night, with their speedboat roaring out of the waves firing their AK-47s. The crew realised they were under attack when their trawler was peppered with a hail of bullets.

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Some of the crew on board the fishing trawlers that had previously been attacked narrated their ordeal.

"They got us at about 1.30 a.m., they came on board, they came with a speed boat, nine of them all armed. They came looking for money, they ate our food and looted the ship of anything of value, including the captain's shoes."

"Pirate attacks have peaked in recent weeks with fishermen subjected to unprecedented levels of violence," said a manager with one of the fishing companies.

"Some few years back they would come, they attack you, they take what ever you have on board and they go without killing people, but in the last three years the killing has basically been on the increase."

The Nigerian Trawlers Owners Association also lamented that the business of commercial fishing was at the edge of collapsed due to the activities of pirates. It said that the situation was terrible that no seafares, not even captains are willing to make any fishing voyage again for fear of attack on the high sea.

Press officer, Yemi Nelson of the Ministry of Agriculture, told VOA few days ago that extra security measures had been put in place on the Nigerian waters, although he did not give the details.

The Nigerian Navy has also promised to intensify its patrols of the 850-kilometres coastline with 15 extra boats.

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