

News

Military Fumes As Youths Kill 15 Personnel In Delta

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• Commanding Officer, Two Majors, One Captain, 12 Soldiers Murdered • CDS Orders Manhunt For Suspects
• Community Leader Accuses Army Of Invasion • Killings Senseless, An Act Of Terrorism – HURIWA

1 DEFENCE high command has ordered a total crackdown on youths who murdered 15 of its personnel in Bomadi Local Council of Delta State.

The action of the youths has triggered anger in military headquarters Abuja, with the Chief of Defence Staff (CDS), General Christopher Gwabin Musa, directing the immediate investigation of the incident and arrest of those involved in the heinous crime.

According to the spokesman of the Defence Headquarters, Brig. General Tukur Gusau, the soldiers were killed on Thursday, March 14, 2024.

His words: "The troops of 181 Amphibious Battalion, Bomadi Local Government Area of Delta State while on peace mission to Okuoma community in Bomadi LGA of Delta State, were surrounded by some community youths and killed on Thursday, March 14, 2024.

"The unfortunate incident occurred when the troops responded to a distress call after the communal crisis between the Okuoma and Okoloba communities both in Delta State.

"The reinforcement team led by the Commanding Officer was also attacked, leading to the death of the Commanding Officer, two Majors, one Captain and 12 Soldiers.

"The Chief of Defence Staff (CDS), General Christopher Gwabin Musa, has directed the immediate investigation and arrest of those involved in the heinous crime. The occurrence has been reported to the Delta State government.

"However, the military remains focused and committed to its mandate of maintaining peace and security in the country. So far, a few arrests have been

made while steps are in place to unravel the motive behind the attack. Additional details later."

2 The Guardian learnt that the crisis between the two communities started on January 27, 2024, and led to the death of three persons - Igho Meshack, Godspower Awusa and Okiemute Agbabuleke.

However, the vice president general of the Okuoma community, David Akata, has accused the Nigerian Army of invasion of the community, saying that the "unknown gunmen" who turned out to be Nigerian Army personnel, shot sporadically at anyone in sight leaving three indigenous dead and several others injured.

He claimed that his community recorded three casualties with many others injured and houses set ablaze as the armed men in military uniforms wreaked havoc on the community from a speedboat.

"The armed men suspected to be Nigerian Army personnel on Friday, March 14, 2024, carried out the genocide on the citizens of the community by setting their buildings and properties ablaze with chanting of war songs.

"We woke up to see our community surrounded with men in military uniform numbering in their tens; and without no reason, they started shooting at sight leading to the death of three promising youths of the community and several others in-

jured from gun bullets. The same military men repeated their genocide actions on the innocent and law-abiding citizens of Okuoma community on Friday, March 15, 2024, leaving many buildings to the rubbles as they carried offensive arson on the community buildings.

"As I speak, the number of persons who died in the barbaric attack could not be ascertained as many of the aged men, women and youths fled into nearby bushes and we suspect that some women and children might have drowned in the river because many ran into the river out of panic.

"It is disheartening that the Delta State government and security operatives in the state, with a lackadaisical approach, have not been able to quell the crisis between the two communities. We entered a peace accord with the state government and security operatives in the state.

"We stand by the accord but often times the Okoloba people harassed our people by assaulting them, and our pleas on the state government to expedite action and call the Okolobians to order fell on deaf ears; allowing the Okoloba community people to use their mercenaries in military uniforms and bandits to kill our people.

When contacted, the Public Relations Officer, PRO, 63 Brigade, Asaba, Emma Onoja simply said

"the Defence Headquarters has issued a release on the matter."

Meanwhile, the Human Rights Writers Association of Nigeria (HURIWA) has described as an act of terrorism, the killings of over a dozen of soldiers including many senior military officers by gunmen in Bomadi local council.

The rights group said the killings were insensitive, senseless, misdirected and absolutely reprehensible.

HURIWA has also thrown its weight behind the order made by the Chief of Defence Staff for the immediate arrest and prosecution of the killers.

The group noted that it was unfortunate that armed soldiers deployed for a peace keeping mission were killed by the warring factions in a direct attempt to undermine peace and stability in Delta State.

It noted that the aim of the killers of those soldiers was to expand the frontiers of the conflicts and to draw in the armed forces of Nigeria to become a party in the need-less infighting among the gangsters.

HURIWA praised the Nigerian Army for exercising restraint. It noted that for the Chief of Defence Staff to opt for observing the principle of rule of law shows a high level of compliance to the rules of engagement, saying it was highly encouraging.

The group urged soldiers not to stage a reprisal at-

tack on the community because those who killed the soldiers may even be loose canons or hired goons who have no connection with the community and the people.

In a statement yesterday by its National Coordinator, Emmanuel Onwubiko, HURIWA stated that the information that troops deployed for a peacekeeping mission to two warring communities in Bomadi local council of Delta State were massacred came to the group as a massive shock and disbelief, "particularly because these officers were only in that community for a non-kinetic and peace-making initiatives."

"We in HURIWA condemn in no uncertain terms, the dastardly criminal act and indeed one of the most gruesome acts of terrorism, the brutal slaughtering of so many Army officers by some armed hoodlums in a part of Delta State. This is so tragic and despicable to put it mildly and it is hoped that all those involved in this terror attack are arrested and decisively dealt with," the group added.

In a related development, the Nigerian Army in its determination to redouble its efforts to bring insecurity to its knees has held the first edition of the 2024 Nigerian Army Leadership Seminar.

The seminar was organised in conjunction with the Nigerian Institute of Management with the theme, 'Social Skills as

Strategic Tools for Effective Leadership and Inspiration in the Nigerian Army'.

The leadership seminar held at the Nigerian Army School of Finance and Administration, Apapa, Lagos State, was to imbue officers within the rank of Lieutenant Colonels, Colonels and the equivalents with the requisite skills and competences to tackle current and future threats to national security.

According to the Special Guest, Commandant Nigerian Army Corps of Supply and Transport, Major General Adekunle Adeyinka, the seminar was designed to enhance critical thinking capabilities of officers to enable them take quick decisions while applying appropriate principles in tackling operational challenges.

He stressed that the theme of the seminar highlights the significance the Nigerian Army places on leadership effectiveness within the officer cadre at various levels of command, adding that experiences in the various theatres of operations have revealed new perspectives and challenges to combating adversaries existing in today's complex environment whom scholars describe as 'enemies without boundaries'.

Adeyinka explained that the seminar is designed to ensure the optimisation of the command philosophy of the Chief of Army Staff, which is 'To Transform the Nigerian Army into a Well Trained, Equipped and Highly Motivated Force Towards Achieving its Constitutional Responsibility within a Joint Environment'.

He added that the philosophy statement is derived from the mission of the Nigerian Army which is 'To win all land battles and confront other security threats in furtherance of Nigeria's vital national interest of preservation and protection of sovereignty and territorial integrity'.

He stressed that defeating adversaries require enhanced social skills, which would enhance officers' capacity to respond more appropriately to the rather complex scenarios that unfold in the theatres of operations.

See the remaining part of this article on www.guardian.ng



Head of Operations Nomba, Zainab Alabi (left); Actress, Folu Storms; Guardian Woman Festival Creator and CSO Global, The Guardian, Anita Ibru; Chief Executive Officer, Guardian Newspapers Limited, Toke Ibru; General Manager, LASSRA, Bilikiss Adebiyi-Abiola and Founder, Alpha Studios, Dolly Phillips at Guardian Woman Festival, day two held at Federal Palace, Victoria Island, Lagos...yesterday.

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