

Reprisal: Ijaw Youth Council raises alarm over invasion, killing of 40 residents

From Ann Godwin, Obinna Nwaoku (Port Harcourt), Adamu Abuh (Abuja) and Julius Osahon (Yenagoa)

• Bayelsa gov Diri, ex-gov Sylva trade accusations

• Senate investigates killing of army personnel, Reps mourns

THE aftermath of the recent killing of 17 Nigerian Army personnel took a disturbing twist yesterday as the Ijaw Youth Council (IYC) raised the alarm over an alleged invasion of Igbomotoru community in South Ijaw Local Council of Bayelsa State.

It was learnt that troops of the Nigerian Army invaded Igbomotoru on Monday morning, burning houses and allegedly killing some persons.

The soldiers were said to have arrived in five gunboats.

Confirming the incident, IYC, at a media briefing in Port Harcourt, alleged that the soldiers killed about 40 people.

IYC President, Alaye Theophilus, said the community was held hostage by the soldiers, and that many houses were burnt down.

He questioned the rationale behind the alleged invasion, saying Igbomotoru had been peaceful until the military men arrived.

Theophilus further displayed gory pictures of bod-

ies on the streets and claimed that a humanitarian crisis was ongoing in the area. He added that military men were preventing people from exiting or entering the community.

Theophilus said: "Okuama community is not an Ijaw community and they are not boundary communities with Igbomotoru II either. We don't know the yardstick used in reaching this decision.

"We are saying that from today, the military should be professional in their engagement. We don't want to slide into the pre-amnesty era where the whole region was in a state of lawlessness.

"We cannot fold our hands and watch the Nigeria military, in this 21st century, kill our people like fowls. We are also calling on the military to explain to the Ijaw Nation, the reason for the invasion of Igbomotoru II community."

He added: "We condemn what happened in Delta State, where armed men killed over 16 soldiers that were going for peacekeeping. We don't accept that in the Niger Delta.

This is an act that no sane man will be happy about.

"Often, when we have some misguided youths act against security operatives, we experience invasion, burning down of communities. We want to ask if it is the same rule of engagement they apply in other zones of the country.

"We are appealing to the Nigeria military to ensure that there will no longer be reprisals while they are rooting for the culprits. What we are experiencing in Okuama is the burning down of houses and killings. We are calling on the President and Chief of Defence Staff to come to the aid of Niger Delta."

This came as current Bayelsa State governor, Douye Diri, and a former governor of the state, Timipre Sylva, traded accusations over the killings.

Sylva, who was the All Progressives Congress (APC) candidate in the November 11, 2024 governorship election, had berated politicians and particularly, the state government for arming non-state actors with guns and ammunition during the poll.

"I condemn in totality the killing of men of the Joint Task Force in Okuama, Delta State. This, again, shows why politicians should not arm irresponsible non-state actors. The last Bayelsa governorship election featured a lot of disheartening state sponsorship of gunmen.

"And today, we all see the result of that act of desperation and the unnecessary loss of precious Nigerian lives. My heart goes out to the families of those gallant soldiers that lost their lives," Sylva said.

Diri, however, took a swipe at the former governor, saying the statement was reminiscent of a pot calling the kettle black.

A statement by Diri's Chief Press Secretary, Daniel Alabrah, condemned Sylva's "introduction of politics" into the killing, adding that it smacks of insensitivity; coming at a time when true patriots were mourning.

It reads: "The military authorities should be allowed to conduct a thorough investigation into the sordid occurrence in Okuama.

Comments should be restrained at this time, while efforts are on to unravel the perpetrators.

"It is, therefore, very unfortunate and sad that Chief Sylva chose to play politics with the evil act of the killing of Nigerian soldiers, at a time patriots in our country are outraged and mourning.

"Introducing politics into the Okuama killing is insensitive, just as it is condemnable and akin to dancing on their graves. For those who know, this is like the pot calling the kettle black.

"Sylva's unending bellyaching and whining over the 2023 Bayelsa governorship election does not change the fact that it has been won and lost. He and his ilk should embrace this reality and join hands with our government to further the development of our state."

Meanwhile, the Senate, yesterday, mandated its committees on Army, Defence, Air Force and Navy to investigate the March 14 killing of the soldiers in Okuama.

This followed a point of order raised by Abdulaziz Yar'adua (APC, Katsina) during plenary.

The motion was tagged: 'The killing of Nigerian Army Per-

sonnel in Okuama Community, Delta State, and the Necessity for an Urgent Investigation'.

The upper chamber urged the Federal Government to ensure that those responsible for the heinous crime were identified and apprehended.

It said they should be "brought to face the full consequences of their action through a fair and transparent legal process".

Raising Orders 41 and 51 of the Senate Standing Rules, Yar'adua, who is Chairman of Senate Committee on Army, described the incident as a serious threat to national security and the stability of the nation.

"The recent tragic incident in Okuama community, Ughelli South Local Council of Delta State on Thursday, March 14, resulted in the loss of a Commanding Officer, two Majors, a Captain and 13 soldiers during a peace mission. This highlights a serious threat to national security and the stability of the nation. The tragic incident underscores the urgent need for justice and accountability without resorting to retribution," Yar'adua said.

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