

# Reprisals Claim 12 Lives In Rivers

By Soni Daniel and  
Ubokikwan Gabriel,  
Port Harcourt

Residents of Port Harcourt were jolted on Monday morning when gunmen took

## • Militancy Grounds Niger Delta, Laments Jonathan

over some streets and fired shots indiscriminately.

The motive was not immediately known but

sources said it was a confrontation between two cult groups fighting for supremacy.

Five people, one of them a

woman, reportedly died around Okija Street where Igbo traders sell electrical materials. The woman was shot dead in her car before

the shooting escalated and spread to other parts of the city.

The gunmen moved over to

Continues on A2

# Reprisals Claim 12 Lives In Rivers

Continued from A1

the Port Harcourt Main Motor Park and shot and killed a man near the flyover in the Abali area.

Attempts by policemen to repel them led to an encounter which lasted for about an hour before the police called for a reinforcement. The boys left.

But they moved towards the inner city, forcing workers to flee in the direction of the state Secretariat and the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) on Bank Road, close to Government House.

Those who live around Wilson Bakery in Borikiri Sandfill said there were orders from cult groups for residents to switch off their security lights.

Ringling gun shots started soon after the enforcement of the blackout.

Sandfill is said to have a building belonging to Soboma George, whose "boys" trooped into the area in the evening and enforced the blackout.

It was like everyone would perish while the shootings and explosions lasted, the residents said.

Cars could not drive on the streets as people ran away from the most volatile sections. Some casualties were victims of stray bullets.

As the news of the attacks spread, officers from Mile One police station, opposite the Mile One Market, cordoned off part of Ikwerre Road, from Okija to the market, raising fears that a war had broken out.

The action of the police and the eruption of gunshots forced traders to vacate the market for most part of the day.

Traffic wardens and other law enforcement agents deserted their duty posts as gun shots rent the air while motorists mean-

dered to their destinations in the confusion that lasted for hours.

In Rumuolumeni, the fighting that started on Saturday continued as more and more people were killed and their corpses taken away by the assassins, apparently for ritual purposes.

Police sources said no fewer than seven people had been murdered in Rumuolumeni by Monday afternoon.

Policemen were later deployed in most parts of Port Harcourt as Vice President, Goodluck Jonathan, and Niger Delta Governors arrived for a meeting on how to end hostage taking and bring about peace and development in the region.

Some of the gunmen left the streets only when the convoys of the Governors began to blare their way into the city.

Police Public Relations Officer, Ireju Barasua, confirmed the attacks but not the number of casualties.

She said more policemen have been deployed in the trouble spots to prevent the crisis from spreading.

Rivers State has not known peace in the last three weeks because of the menace of militants and renewed cult violence in most parts of the state.

Jonathan expressed regret over the havoc done to the economy by the raging militancy in the Niger Delta and raised a Peace and Rehabilitation Committee to encourage the insurgents to lay down their arms and embrace peace.

The committee, headed by Senator David Brigidi from Bayelsa, is expected to take steps to end hostage taking and find ways of creating jobs for youths in the region so as to ensure a conducive atmosphere for economic growth.

It will co-ordinate the work of similar bodies set up by Niger Delta states and brief the Presidency on a regular basis.

Jonathan lamented that the activities of militants have forced foreigners to flee the region, particularly Rivers and Bayelsa, making it difficult for major development projects to be executed for the benefit of the people.

"It is as if the whole of the Niger Delta is at war", he noted. "It is not only hostage taking and disruption of oil facilities but in some communities people are not free to go about their normal activities because gun-wielding elements pervade such places daily, making life very difficult for all."

"The activities of these militants are impacting negatively on our economy and if they are allowed to continue then the whole of the Niger Delta would be grounded and that could ruin our economy."

"We have reached a point where we have to call ourselves together and talk because we believe that even if two countries are fighting a war, they often go to the conference table and not the battle field to resolve their differences."

"The present administration means well for the Niger Delta. We believe that the agitation is genuine and reasonable since this area has not been given adequate attention over the years by successive administrations."

"We have already drawn up a programme and agenda for the development of the Niger Delta, which will soon be unfolded by Mr. President. But there must be a ceasefire for the

programme to take off.

"That is why we are appealing to our youths to stop further attacks and embrace peace so that we can move on and change the ugly situation in the Niger Delta".

The committee, which has a former member of the Ondo Assembly, Kingsley Kuku, as Secretary, will work for one year in the first instance before the review of its terms of reference and membership.

After it may have restored peace, it would go into other activities aimed at empowering the youths and settling them down.

The committee will have four representatives from oil companies, a representative each from the police, State Security Service (SSS), and the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC).

Rivers Governor, Celestine Omehia, said the state has already inaugurated a special team to liaise with militants, end hostage taking, and rehabilitate the youths.

The meeting was attended by Omehia, Governors Godswill Akpabio (Akwa Ibom), Timi Sylva (Bayelsa), Liyel Imoke (Cross River), Emmanuel Uduaghan (Delta), and Osarhene Osunbor (Edo).

Managing Director of the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC), Timi Alaibe, and NDDC Chairman, Sam Edem, were also in attendance.

State representatives on the committee are Esoetok Ikpong Ikpong and Bassey Ekpa (Akwa Ibom), George Timinimi and Godwin Ebosa (Delta), Hassan Douglas and Jerry Needam (Rivers), James Jephtha and Joshua Benaimesia (Bayelsa), James Iyasere and Florence Gbinije-Erabor (Edo).