

Soldier, 13 others killed in JTF, Boko Haram clash

•Table your grievances for dialogue, YCE tells sect

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THIRTEEN suspected members of the Boko Haram sect and one soldier of the Joint Task Force (JTF) were killed on Tuesday during a gun duel between the sect and the military in Maiduguri, Borno State.

Spokesman of the JTF, Sagir Musa, a Lieutenant, disclosed this in a telephone interview from Maiduguri.

He claimed victory for the security forces during the encounter with the terrorists.

This is coming as a traditional ruler in the Bonny Island is currently telling the JTF in the area all he knows about the series of oil theft incidences that have been rocking his domain for some time now.

An operative of the JTF in the Niger Delta in a telephone interview said he would not reveal the name of the Bonny chief now until investigation was completed.

"They are many and highly connected, so we have to be careful. But we have a senior traditional ruler and many others with us over stolen crude oil of about 1,000 tonnes," 2 Brigade Army spokesman, Michael Etete, a Major, said.

On his part, Musa, in Maiduguri, said: "One soldier was

CONTINUES ON PAGE 2

Anambra

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CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

killed by Boko Haram while the JTF killed 13 Boko Haram gunmen."

Musa said members of the sect had detonated a bomb at a JTF checkpoint in Maiduguri, and that all the deaths occurred in the ensuing gun battle.

A source in the town, who pleaded anonymity, told our correspondent also that he counted 13 bodies of the sect members and one soldier after the gun duel.

He said the JTF recovered some weapons and improvised explosive device (IED) materials from the scene, while several of the hoodlums fled.

It would be recalled that the military in the North East have in the past been playing down their own casualties in fighting with Boko Haram.

Meanwhile, Etete, the 2-Brigade Army spokesman, also said a Nigerian-registered vessel, MT Atlantic Star, was impounded while illegally tapping crude oil from a pipeline.

He said the arrests, by troops of Sector Two in Bonny, followed a military intelligence on December 29, 2012.

"Further investigation is ongoing and the suspects will be

handed over to the Nigerian Security and Civil Defence Corps for prosecution," he said.

He restated JTF's commitment to stamp out oil theft, oil bunkering and other criminal activities within its area of responsibility in line with its mandate.

Captain of the vessel, Rauf Rasak, also told reporters that the vessel was hijacked by six unknown gunmen who threatened to kill the crew members if he refused to cooperate with their illicit directives.

Rasak further claimed that the gunmen immediately took over navigation of the vessel, anchored it in Bonny and thereafter loaded the vessel with the illegal crude oil.

"While they were loading the vessel with the crude oil, men of the JTF approached us and the gunmen fled the scene," he said.

The captain said the crew members were innocent of the charges being brought against them by the JTF.

Also on the first day of the new year, 30 inmates of Maiduguri Maximum Prisons were released on the order of Borno State Governor, Kashim Shettima, who said the gesture was based on recommendations of the State Advisory Committee

on Prerogative of Mercy.

He said some of the beneficiaries were those who had stayed for long periods awaiting trial and others serving jail terms for minor offenses. Shettima also promised to train those who regained their freedom in different skills and provide capital for them to start businesses.

Meanwhile, the Yoruba Council of Elders (YCE) has called on the Boko Haram sect to present whatever may be its grievances in the open to the Federal Government for dialogue towards putting an end to the menace posed by the sect.

The call was contained in the seasonal greetings addressed to President Goodluck Jonathan, and dated December 31.

It was signed by National Treasurer of the Council, Dejo Raimi, on behalf of its President, Adeyinka Adebayo, a retired Major General.

The message was made available to newsmen in Ibadan on Tuesday.

Recalling that over three years of rebellion against the state by the Boko-Haram had not produced any positive result, the YCE, also known as 'Igbimo Agba Yoruba', called

on the group to bring any issue it wants government to address out, and lay it on the table in an open dialogue with the government.

The statement reads: "In over three years of open rebellion against the state, Boko Haram has not achieved anything positive, rather, their activities have left behind sorrow, tears and blood in that many promising young men, women and elders alike have been sent to their untimely graves.

"We would like them to know that nothing shall be achieved by mindless blood-letting. In all of human history, great wars that were fought were equally concluded, not on the battlefield, but at the conference room.

"The YCE therefore calls on the Boko Haram to jettison violence and allow peace to reign in our country."

It commended what it called the President's "maturity, diligence, tenacity and charisma with which you have handled the affairs of the nation since God thrust the reins of leadership of our nation on your good self", adding, "no doubt, the major challenges that your administration has battled so seriously is the issue of security."