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Reps To Probe JTF Over Niger Delta Degradation

By Rotimi Akinwumi
ABUJA

• Blames Agip For Death Of 14 In Bayelsa

The House of Representatives on Thursday resolved to set up an ad hoc committee to investigate the activities of the Joint Task Force (JTF) in the Niger Delta in relation to the alleged burning and destruction of equipment seized from illegal refineries without proper recourse to environmental laws.

The House also mandated the committee, when constituted, to investigate the activities of Nigerian Agip Oil Company, to ensure that it improves on its facilities to avoid further destruction of lives.

The House particularly noted the recent death of 14 people in Azuzuama community in the region, mandating the committee to probe and determine the circumstance that led to their death.

The decision of the parliament followed the adoption of a motion entitled: "Urgent need to bring an end to the despoliation of the Niger Delta environment through the burning of equipment confiscated from illegal operators of refineries," raised by Douye Diri, Leo Ogor and 12 others.

Diri, who spoke on behalf of the others, drew the attention of the House to the fact that the JTF was set up in 2004 to protect pipelines, prevent the operation of illegal refineries and generally maintain peace, law and order in the Niger Delta.

The outfit, he however noted, seem to be derailing from its assignment, judging by its actions that now constitute health hazards to the people of the region.

According to him, the communities in the area suffer from effects of burning and destruction of oil tools and equipment seized from operators of illegal oil refineries, which is not done according to internationally accepted best practises adding that it has greatly polluted the environment.

"The JTF as part of their mandate to arrest illegal oil vessels used by oil bunkers to steal crude and also prevent the destruction of the facilities of the oil installation has gone further in the destruction of seized illegal barges and vessels used by vandals in their operation,

the JTF in their zeal to show that they are working, without recourse to international best practice set this barges on fire and the illegal refineries which often times are situated within the communities that has been exposed to environmental pollution from the very time oil was discovered.

"Looking at a study carried out by environmental experts from international organizations and some Nigerian scholars in 2006, clearly shows that the Niger Delta is "one of the world's most severely petroleum impacted ecosystems" in their various reports they stated that the damage from oil operations is chronic and cumulative, and has acted synergistically impaired coastal ecosystem and compromised the livelihood and health of the regions impoverished residents.

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"The human rights implica-

tions are serious, under reported and have received little attention from the Government of Nigeria or the oil companies.

"The actions of the JTF in the Niger Delta with regard to the treatment of seized oil tools and accessories used by the oil bunkers have given rise to this motion.

"The effect of exploration has already had negative effect on the inhabitants and environment of the Niger Delta, and now the activities of the JTF are now adding to what the people are facing in their mode of operation.

"On land were the JTF arrest this illegal oil bunkers and the items they use in their illegal acts, they destroy those items, and they fail to consider the aftermath effect of their action on the host communities, often times most of those communities are already suffering from environmental pollution, e.g. lands for agriculture and portable drinking water comes to the mind because the soil is polluted by oil exploration and destroy of the environment by constant and willful act of burning.

"Oil pollution in water damages aquatic life and contaminates the water which is mostly the

only source of water the people use both for drinking and other domestic purposes since our communities solely depend on the rivers for water which clearly showed how most of the oil companies in the Niger Delta has failed to provide social amenities as part of their social corporate governance in assisting the Government at all levels.

"In Delta State the JTF announced on the 18th June, 2015 that 32 illegal refineries were destroyed in the following communities Odimodi, Yokri, Forcados, Otegehele, Opumani and Beneath island communities in Burutu and Warri South-West Local Government areas, in all this destruction the JTF has failed to observe international best practice and standards in the destruction to save the ecosystem of the Niger Delta."

On the fire incident that took lives in Azuzuama community in Bayelsa State, he said the issue should be laid firmly at the feet of the oil company that refused to repair their pipelines as and when due.

The House, presided over by the Speaker, Yakubu Dogara, unanimously agreed upon the motion.

PDP Cries Out

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still have condemned these actions if they had taken place in APC-controlled states since these actions are strange to democratic ethics and practices all over the world", Akpabio said.

While expressing further worries that the attention of DSS is being diverted as its activities have been compromised, Akpabio stated that, "At this period of renewed onslaught by terrorists/Boko Haram in the North Eastern part of our dear Nation, we expect security agencies to deploy their arsenals and manpower towards recovering lost territories and ensuring the safety and security of lives and properties of all Nigerians".

"We condemn these arrests, describe them as illegal, a total misplacement of priority, a waste of tax payers' money in an economically challenging time, and a serious threat to democracy.

"Should the DSS succeed in coercing electoral officials of INEC to recant their signatures to documents and therefrom obtain undeserved victories in tribunals for APC - what image would have been created for Nigeria's democracy?"

"We call on the president to intervene and refrain the DSS from partisanship", he added.

According to the ex-governor of Akwa Ibom State, the PDP has unearthed evidence that INEC officials are being arrested and forced to produce falsified documents to help the cases of APC candidates before the election tribunals.

"This is abominable and unacceptable", he said, calling on the president and all well-meaning Nigerians to "intervene to preserve the independence of the tribunal and that of INEC".

He further directed, "The DSS must refocus its energy towards its primary role of preserving peace, protecting lives, ensuring internal security and order, preventing mutiny or violent and unconstitutional takeover of government.

"In the past, many Nigerians were able to sleep with their eyes closed because of the noble role played by the DSS. This same DSS helped in wiping out kidnapping in South-East, South-South and other parts of Nigeria in collaboration with other security services. Their efforts in intelligence gathering to assist in the war against insurgency are applauded by all Nigerians.

"The DSS cannot and should not now become a political tool to win cases for APC candidates in courts and tribunals.

"We plead with Mr President to stop this operation capture Akwa Ibom, Rivers and Abia States by all means by certain APC schemes. Mr President, please restore confidence in the polity by putting an end to all witch-hunt, illegal arrests, detention and harassment".



Newly graduated Medical Doctors taking oath during the induction of the second batch of qualified Medical Doctors of University of Jos on Thursday. Photo: NAN

FG Set For Forensic Audit Of NNPC, NIMASA, Customs, NPA, Others

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contributions into Federation Account.

"So we are convinced that by appointing audit firms, we will allow professionals to carry out the exercise which will be free from political connection.

"We are sure that the outcome of the investigation will command the trust and confidence of

all the stakeholders," he added.

Oshiomhole said it is no longer going to be business as usual, adding that the laws as they apply to various institutions must be applied in full.

He however pointed out that if the audit reports recommend that the government should carry out further investigations, it would be done.

All the books of these agencies would be opened in line with the present administration's mantra of transparency and accountability, noting that no agency of government would have any protection not be investigated.

On the names of the two audit firms to carry out the forensic audit, the Governor of Edo State,

said it would be made public next Thursday at during the meeting of the committee with other agencies of government such as Nigeria National Petroleum Corporation, DPR, NIMASA, among others.

Oshimole assured that Nigeria would be better for it at the end of the day, as the Committee would carry out a thorough job.