

Six Burnt To Death In Aiteo Fire Outbreak

By **Igoniko Oduma** - April 25, 2019

Yenagoa – Six persons suspected to be pipeline vandals were reportedly burnt to death in the fire outbreak that occurred on Sunday along the Nembe Creek Trunk Line (NCTL) operated by oil major, Aiteo.

Rear Admiral Akinjide Akinrinade, Commander of the Joint Task Force in the Niger Delta, code-named Operation Delta Safe (OPDS), disclosed this on Wednesday after leading an inspection team to the impacted site at the Awoba axis of the 97-kilometre Nembe-Bonny oil export pipeline.

The management of Aiteo had confirmed the fire incident in a statement on Tuesday by its spokesman, Ndiana Matthew, who stated that the inferno had been completely contained.

The oil firm declared force majeure on the OML 29 oilfield following the fire outbreak on Sunday, saying series of inspections would be carried out as well as a joint investigation visit (JIV).

Akinrinade was accompanied by Flag Officer Commanding, Eastern Naval Command, Rear Admiral David Adeniran, on the visit to the site of the fire which destroyed a vast stretch of the environment.

He expressed regret at the development which led to outage of the 150,000 barrels per day at the NCTL, noting that troops of the security outfit deployed in the area responded immediately the incident happened.

The OPDS commander also explained that troops on surveillance at a near-by houseboat, who arrived at the scene of fire, confirmed that all the masterminds who breached the pipeline under high pressure died from the explosion and fire that resulted from the vandalism.

On arrests, he said although the vandals died in the act, efforts were underway to track down their collaborators because the criminals involved in oil theft operated in groups.

Akinrinade added that the security task force would redouble its efforts against oil theft and pipeline vandalism, and assured oil firms in the Niger Delta of the safety of its personnel and facilities.

He said: "I am here for an on-the-spot assessment following the fire incident on the Nembe Creek Trunk Line, which is a critical national asset, and to restate our commitment to protecting oil facilities in the Niger Delta region.

"This incident has adverse economic implications and the military high command is concerned. That is why I am here with my component commanders and we shall continue to provide security to the oil firms.

"I assure the oil firm of security to ensure that the breached point on the line is traced and fixed."

As at the time of the visit of Rear Admiral Akinrinade and his team to the area, the remains of the suspected vandals and oil thieves were being recovered in the creeks.

A search party, including local divers, were seen combing the area for possibility of more dead bodies.

Aiteo had shut oil injection on the line and declared a force majeure on oil exports from the export line following report of the fire incident on April 21 by the JTF surveillance team.

Force majeure is a legal clause that absolves a firm from liabilities to meet contractual obligations due to circumstances outside its control.

The NCTL was earlier shut on March 1, 2019 and restarted on March 6 following an explosion from a well head in Nembe Creek, which also resulted to a fire incident but there was no loss of life.

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