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## Explosion Kills 12, Pirates Abduct 2 In Bayelsa

By Osa Okhominia

— Jul 11, 2015 4:00 am | 0 Comments

Twelve persons were yesterday killed in a pipeline explosion along the Tebidaba-Azuzuama trunk line belonging to Nigerian Agip Oil Company in Azuzuama Community of Southern Ijaw Local Government Area of Bayelsa State, as sea pirates also abduct two passenger along the Kula waterways of Brass Local government.

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The explosion, according to Community sources, occurred during a Joint Investigation Visit (JIV) for the official clamping of a spillage site along the route of the Agip pipeline.

LEADERSHIP Weekend gathered that the victims of the explosion were burnt beyond recognition and could not be identified.

Though no one could confirm the identity of the victim, leadership gathered that the JIV team is made up officials from the Ministry of Environment, the Department of Petroleum Resources, the Nigerian Agip Oil Company (NAOC), the representative of the Azuzuama Community and the NOSDRA.

Leadership Weekend gathered that two soldiers attached to the team for security, may have also been killed in the explosion.

A former Vice Chairman of the Azuzuama Community Development Committee, Comrade Dennis Dumde, confirmed the recovery of 12 dead bodies from the explosion site between Thursday night and Friday morning.

According to him, though the source of the fire is not known, "the identity of the victim can not be ascertained. They were burnt beyond recognition."

Also confirming the incident, the State Coordinator of the Group known as Environmental Rights Action (ERA), Comrade Morris Alagoa said a team of Environment Ministry officials has been deployed to the community by the State Commissioner, Inuro Wills.

Leadership Weekend gathered that the incident, which occurred at about 4pm

on Thursday, threw the community in mourning.

A source, identified as Steve, said the explosion occurred while a Swamp Boogie, hired to clear the spillage site hit another part of the pipeline and ignited a fire that caught members of the JIV team unaware, "we heard a loud bang. And saw a thick smoke coming from Brown Bush. The location of the ruptured pipe."

"Many of the villagers rushed to the site but the fire ball was huge and could not rescue anyone. At about 8pm, a rescue team was raised by the villagers and searched the scene. Four bodies were recovered on Thursday night."

"Another search on Friday morning, recovered six more burnt bodies. Two persons were rescued. And they are at Okolobiri Teaching Hospital. We can not identify them and be able to know the soldier from the officials. It is sad."

Attempts to speak with State Commissioner for Environment, Inuro Wills, failed as his line was busy. But a Ministry official told leadership on condition of anonymity that the State Governor, Hon. Seriake Dickson have been informed about the development.

The spokesman of the State Police Command, Astimin Butswat, confirmed the development and said he is expecting full brief from the



Marine Component of the Police Command, "the Command can confirm only Ten persons were found dead."

Meanwhile, a passenger boat, christened MV Tari, was conveying passengers from Port Harcourt in Rivers State to Okpoama community in Bayelsa State.

The incident, which occurred at about 7pm on Thursday, led to the death of one of the passengers identified as Godspower Amuna.

The Boat Manager, Emma Alabo and Wodu Udoka were however kidnapped by the Pirates.

Sources confirmed that other passengers sustained various degrees of injuries and bullet wounds.

Confirming the incident, the Second Boat Manager, Ebitimi Tekenah, said the pirates, numbering Seven, came in two speed boats, "They started shooting at us. This led to the death of one passenger. Some others including Ikonigha Joseph, Numonyo Amade sustained bullet wounds."

One other passenger confirmed to Leadership Weekend that Numonyo Amade has been operated upon at the Okpoama Medical centre and bullet extracted from his abdomen. And another female passenger had bullet removed from her leg."

Ebitimi, who offer prayers to God for surviving the attack, said "I was sleeping when I heard the shooting. I immediately went to the front to find out. Some gunmen descended on me with bottle and shattered my head. They forced me into one of the speed boats."

"It was when I told them that I was the boat engineer, that they dropped me. They told me to start the boat and take the wounded home for treatment."



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