

Probe killing of 25 Ijaw youths, Fed Govt urged

THE Federal Government has been urged to probe the alleged killing of 25 Ijaw youths by troops of the Joint Task Force (JTF) during the invasion of Ogboinbiri flow station of Nigerian Agip Oil Company last month.

The Niger Delta Reconciliation Committee (NDRC), which made the call in a statement in Warri, Delta State, described the incident as "extra-judicial" killing.

It accused the JTF soldiers of opening fire on the youths on June 17 and 21, after they had surrendered and ought to be captured by the soldiers and treated as prisoners of war.

From Shola O'neil, Warri

"Without encouraging hostage-taking, we condemn and call for probe of the recent unconscionable extra-judicial execution by the JTF in the first encounter despite the surrender of 10 Ijaw youths in alleged kidnap mission to the Ogboinbiri Agip Flow Station in Bayelsa State.

"We are shocked that Brig-Gen Lawrence Ngubane obviously was not in control of his troops in a democracy reportedly boasts about his JTF's unprofessional conduct when the youths should rationally have been handed over to appropri-

ate authorities as prisoners of war for trial," it said.

NDRC's President Ramson Erebo and Secretary, Prince Oweilayefa Ekrika, said the action of the troops at Ogboinbiri betrayed the position of the Federal Government on reconciliation and peace in the region.

The organisation accused JTF's Commander, Brig. Gen. Lawrence Ngubane, of misleading the President into issuing the order for soldiers to storm the facility.

It noted that such perceived careless killing of Ijaw youths by soldiers could escalate fresh crisis in the zone and implore

the president to get to the root of the matter and ensure that the deceased get justice.

"With the rising death toll, it is an insult on the psyche of the Ijaw nation for the JTF to deny application of maximum force when it is always fatal bashes in several encounters. Sadly, the ongoing peace and reconciliation process to which our organization is involved and Mr. President is avowedly committed cannot be helped by insincerity and thrust of physical force by the JTF, but by dialogue and enlightened crisis management," the statement added.

Nevertheless, the NDRC

hailed the release of Alhaji Mujahidin Asari-Dokubo (Leader of the Niger Delta Peoples Volunteer Force) and urged all freedom fighters to cease-fire to create enabling environment for the present administration to fulfill its promise to the impoverished people of the region.

Similarly, the group described the death of the Ijaw youths as one "story too many and urged oil companies operating in the region to change their attitude and urgently open windows of employment for the youths in the interest of reconciliation and sustainable peace in the Niger Delta."