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Oil workers protest insecurity in Niger Delta

11/2/2009

From Clarice Azuatalam, Port Harcourt

WORKERS of French oil firm, Total, yesterday protested the security situation in Niger Delta.

The workers, who protested outside their office in Port Harcourt, Rivers State, said their action was in line with the strike by the local chapter of the Petroleum and Natural Gas Senior Staff Association of Nigeria (PENGASSAN).

PENGASSAN chairperson Grace Olowo said: "We started a warning strike (on Monday) to press home our demand on the government to provide security for the lives and property of all oil workers because it is apparent that we have become targets of attack in recent months."

Oil workers have become targets of kidnapping and hostage-taking in recent times.

Gunmen killed an 11-year old daughter of a Shell official, Mr Samuel Awonusi and abducted her nine-year old brother on their way to school in Port Harcourt. The boy has since been released.

The wife of a former Minister of State for Petroleum, Edmond Daukoru, Gladys and another employee of Agip were also been seized and later released.

Workers protesting outside Total's offices lamented that the company seems worst-hit by the incidents. They said many of their colleagues had been attacked or kidnapped.

One of them, who was abducted last October, is yet to be released, they said, raising doubts over his safety.

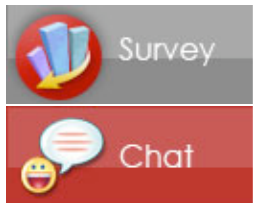
The Chairman of Total branch of PENGASSAN, Mr. Oyisi Okatahi, said the firm has promised to tighten security around the workers.

"The management promised us that they were willing to provide us with security if we were willing to work," he said.

Okatahi said the union representatives will meet with the management to discuss some outstanding, adding: "there is a likelihood that we are going to call off the strike today (yesterday)."

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