

Okomu oil, community resolve conflict

IT appears there is an end in sight to the lingering conflict between Okomu Oil Plc and Okomu community following the intervention of the Commander, Joint Task Force (JTF) in the Niger Delta, Major General Emmanuel Atewe.

Eight persons who are workers of Okomu Oil have been killed and hundreds of hectares of rubber trees were burnt since the quarrel started. In February, two Okomu Oil workers were shot and maimed while others sustained severe injuries after they were attacked by suspected Ijaw youths.

Okomu community is one of the 17 communities located within the precincts of the oil firm operational base in Ovia South West Local Government and it is the only community at loggerheads with the company.

The resolution to end the conflict was reached at a round table meeting held at the premises of the oil firm after an initial peace process was brokered between both parties in Bayelsa State.

In attendance at the close door round table meeting under the watchful eyes of JTF representatives were members of Okomu Commu-

From Osagie Otabor, Benin

nity Development Association and top management of Okomu Oil.

Managing Director of Okomu Oil, Graham Heifer who spoke to newsmen after the meeting expressed optimism that the peace process would stop any further killing of his staff.

Heifer said the company has spent over N40m on the Okomu Community in the past as part of the firm's social responsibility and that he was ready to do more just as other communities benefited within the limits of available funds.

According to him, "We try to help as many communities as we can. In the past we have help this community with development programme worth over N40m. We gave them roads, boreholes and other amenities."

"The JTF played a significant role. They did the most prominent mediators. The JTF did a good job. As a result of its mediation, we hope we can now work together".

"The incident of killing my staff was very regrettable. I cannot be in charge of arresting the perpetrators. The law will do that. I am sure the law will its course if it takes its course. I cannot predetermine what the law

would do. We need to make sure it does not happen again. By this peace meeting, I hope we will not witness any loss of life again."

"I want to also be sure that it would stopped vandalism of our crops in the future. We will rely on the community executive to pass the message around that it is not good for them to steal our produce. We are confident they will take the message back. That they should desist from doing that."

Spokesman for the Okomu community, Ajele Sunday, said the company should deal with only recognized executives of the community and should arrest any imposter.

Ajele said what they want is transparency on the part of the company in terms of living up to its corporate social responsibility.

According to him, "We have only one chairman. What stops you from arresting any persons that want to cause trouble. We are always ready but let transparency be our watchword. We only asked the company to do their social responsibility."

"We need to establish if the attacks came from outsiders or from members of the public. The security should play their roles by doing proper investigation and not on allegations."