

## NIGER DELTA REPORT

## Ogoni women accuse soldiers of killing, raping

- 'Over 20 people have been murdered'
- Army: prove your allegations

Following last week's protest by Yeghe women at the Rivers State Government House, Port Harcourt, during which they alleged killing of their kinsmen/women and other injustices, our correspondent, **PRECIOUS DIKEWOHA**, visited the community



• Mrs Barawii, the mother of the late Monday.



• The late Saturday.



• Mrs. Gbarazia, sister to the late Saturday.

**Y**EGHE women in Ogoni land, Rivers State, yesterday explained why they were clad in black dresses during and after their peaceful rally at the Rivers State Government House, Port Harcourt, on October 27 when they demanded a solution to alleged injustice, killing and raping in their community.

The women said they were worried about insecurity, alleging that soldiers had taken over the place, killing, raping and destroying their crops.

They wanted the Federal Government to recognise one of their sons, the late Timothy Naakuu Paul Birabi, who hailed from Yeghe, as it did to other nationalists, who contributed to the country's development.

The late Birabi died in 2012. He played a prominent role in the 1953 Constitutional Conference. According to his people, he fought for what is known today as the Niger Delta.

Yeghe is also the town of ex-Niger Delta warlord Solomon Ndigbara, who was declared wanted by the Rivers State Police Command, following the killing and destruction of property in the community during the National and State Assembly run.

The *Nation* learnt that on February 22, Yeghe was allegedly invaded by soldiers and after the raid, the people claimed that over 20 persons, indigenes and non-indigenes, were killed.

There were protests after the raid, which made the military authority and the Senate to investigate the incident. When it appeared the matter had been forgotten, Yeghe women recently opened old wounds.

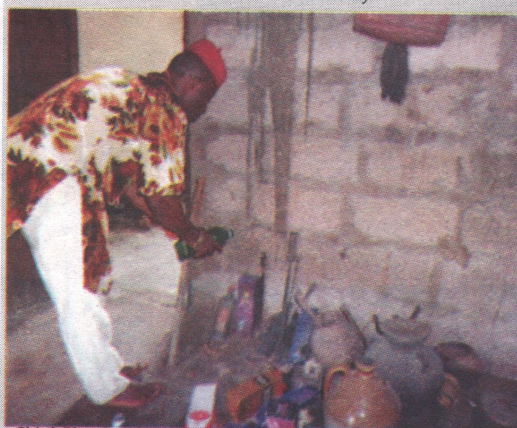
When our correspondent visited the town, the women gathered at Nuge Community Town Hall, Bua Yeghe. They wore black clothes, fasted and prayed.

Their leader, Mrs. Barisua Daodaa, who spoke to *The Nation* during the prayer session, said the women, who were mostly affected by the crisis, are living in pain and sorrow.

Barisua accused Ogoni leaders of abandoning them. She urged that the identity of Yeghe should be unveiled, noting that the community was between two local governments in Ogoni-Khanna and Gokhana.

Barisua alleged that some of the educated indigenes, who would have fought for the community, had been killed. "Others, who would have intervened, are no longer coming home."

The women leader implored the military authority to redeploy the soldiers, stressing that Yeghe was not



• Chief Gbarakpigitte pouring libation when our correspondent visited him.



• Yeghe women during their prayer session.

at war with neighbouring communities.

Said she: "We wore black dresses because of the pains in our hearts. We are not happy because soldiers have killed our children. The continuous killing and abduction of our children is a serious problem to our community. We have continued to ask, who sent these soldiers to our community?"

"We want the government to tell us who deployed the soldiers in our community, because the military has denied, the state government has also denied sending any soldier to our community. But if you go to our farms now, you will see soldiers there. Some of them harass women.

"Over 20 youths have been killed. Nobody is telling us why soldiers are killing our people. They have prevented us from mourning the dead. We are confused, we don't know if we belong to Ogoni or not. Ogoni leaders are not sharing our pains, they have abandoned us."

Deputy Women Leader Mrs. Lesi Faith Gentle said: "We will continue to fight for our rights because the condition in the community is terrible. Our clan produced the first educated person in Ogoni. We are in a situation where nobody has recognised the contributions of our late son, Paul Birabi.

"Today, the whole world knows the late Chief Obafemi Awolowo and Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe because the Federal Government recognises and respects their contributions to the country's development. But the nation is yet to recognise our son's contributions. Maybe, because he was an

indigene of Yeghe and the rest of Ogoni leaders decided not to fight for his national recognition.

"The government should give us what belongs to us. If this is done, there will be peace. Since we are not at war with our neighbours, we are not happy and comfortable with the armoured carriers in our community. Residents now sleep in the bush for fear of being arrested.

"Many women have become hypertensive because of fear. If you doubt me, I will take you round and show you members of the community who have died because of fear. This is our worry. We are farmers; the soldiers have destroyed our farms. We can no longer bear the humiliation."

The Coordinator, Project Yeghe, Comrade Nyimadee Fiito, one of the youth leaders, who facilitated the women rally at the Government House, said he was sad that politicians tagged the peaceful rally as politically-motivated.

He said it was their way of sending a message to the government and the public about the problem the community was facing.

Fiito took the opportunity to inform the world of the centenary celebration of the late Birabi.

He said: "Since the rally in front of the Government House on October 27 has been misinterpreted, it has become imperative to explain the reason for our action. The indigenes are in pains over the killing of young men.

"We are taking this opportunity to inform the world about the centenary celebration of one of the great

sons of Yeghe, the late Paul Birabi."

Some of the women recalled how their sons were killed and kidnapped. They alleged that some of them were murdered in cool blood, while others didn't return home, as they were abducted.

Mrs. Dorothy Barawii, one of the women whose sons were declared missing, alleged that the military invaded the area.

Her words: "The name of my son is Monday Barawii. He became missing on the day the military invaded our community. He went to the farm in the morning, only for somebody to inform us that he saw him being arrested by the soldiers. I have searched everywhere for him, including police stations and army barracks, but we can't find him."

Another woman, Mrs. Dumale Gbarazia, said tearfully: "My son's name is Saturday Gbarazia. He went to the farm as usual. We were at home when somebody told me that my son was shot, and that was all. Till today nobody has come to identify himself as my son's killer. God is the final judge."

The Yeghe-Yaagoroh XI of Te-Ere-Bue Yagwerea Nortem Bori, Chief Confidence Gbarakpigitte, said his subjects were not happy about the killing.

He said what his community needed was peace and not what politics had subjected it to, adding that he would ensure that peace was restored.

Gbarakpigitte enjoined the state and federal governments to order the soldiers out of the community.

One of the community leaders,

who preferred anonymity, said the trouble was caused by an ex-militant leader in the area, whom he alleged was paid by politicians to recruit militants during the election.

A military officer, who spoke in confidence, said: "The call by members of the community to redeploy us is unnecessary.

"We are here for security reason. We are not killing anybody. As you are here now, how many people have they shown you that we have killed? I thank God that many people are happy that we are here. Recently, we caught youths carrying two human heads, so you can see the kind of things happening here, even with our presence."

Acting spokesman 2 Brigade Port Harcourt Lt. Olayemi Samson Sokoya said the allegations were false.

He said it was surprising that the community protested after investigations had been carried out by the military and Senate on the alleged killing, which the state and federal governments were aware of.

Sokoya said: "I don't know why the people are protesting. They should know that the allegations levelled against the Army were false. The Army and Senate did their investigations. We don't know why they are protesting; because that place is not the only place we have deployed our men."

"We deployed our men in parts of this state. There has not been any time the people are coming up with an allegation of rape. It is not true if they said we have killed their people. They should prove their allegations."

## Head teacher arraigned for 'demolition of fence'

THE Head Teacher of ... The complainant, Mr. D...