

Policeman killed as JTF rescues INEC worker, eight others in Akwa Ibom

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A police sergeant has been confirmed killed in Akwa Ibom State in an operation to rid Etim Ekpo and Ukanafun local government areas of militants.

Hoodlums in both local government areas had allegedly been causing deaths and destruction of property estimated at millions of naira in the last one year.

Police Commissioner Adeyemi Ogunjemilusi, who spoke on the killing at the weekend, said: “We lost one sergeant in the operation and recovered some rifles, including police and military uniforms, charms and other materials.”

He said the police action followed the alleged refusal of the hoodlums to heed the offer of amnesty extended to them by Governor Udom Emmanuel.

Ogunjemilusi said the police rescued Otobong Sylvester Ukpong, a worker at the Ukanafun area office of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) as well as eight others, including seven women.

The abductors reportedly got the victims at Ikot Inyang Abia community in Ukanafun.

Ukpong was said to have been abducted on June 5, blindfolded and taken by two gunmen on motorcycles into a bush in Ikot Akpan Ayara in Ukanafun Local Government Area.

It was learnt that the kidnap victims were fed with *garri* and soup, beans and rice.

Ukpong said: “There is no farming activity around the bush we were kept. The abductors erected a canopy in the bush and always cooked the meal there and served us.

Throughout my stay for about two months, I was not allowed to talk to anyone. That is why I find it difficult to talk because my throat is not clear.

“They (abductors) only removed the veils from our eyes in the night when we could not understand the geography of the area. I have not taken my bath, shaved or trimmed my hair since I was taken. This is the only cloth that I put on since I was captured.

“Each time the kidnappers left for operation, they ensured that two heavily armed men were left to guard the den. But on August 18, when the Joint Task Force (JTF) stormed the place, the one who guarded the camp got the signal and went to see what was coming.

“Before he could compose himself, the soldier had fired first and the militants went flat on the ground. He used his charms and amulets and disappeared before the JTF came to rescue us.”

The Chairman of Ukanafun Local Government Area, Mr. Nnamso Idiong and his Etim Ekpo counterpart, Mr. Udeme Eduo, who identified the freed captives, hailed the JTF operatives for restoring peace to the troubled areas.

Idiong said the seven rescued women were abducted from his village, Ikot Inyang Abia, by the gang leader identified simply by his operational name, ‘Englishman’.

He said: “The wife of ‘Englishman’ was arrested by the police because of the activities of her elusive husband. But ‘Englishman’ called me on phone and accused me of ordering the police to arrest his wife, who is still being detained at the police headquarters.

“Following the arrest of his wife, which I knew nothing about, ‘Englishman’ said he was going to kidnap 25 women from my community and would only free them when his wife has been released by the police.

“To make good his threat, he came into the village and captured these seven women and told me this set of women was the first instalment.”

The council chairman regretted that his efforts to broker peace with the leaders of the hoodlums, in line with the state government’s plans, had been unsuccessful.

Idiong said: “Even one of them called me that they would be ready for the peace meeting but when we were all ready for them, they refused to turn up.”