

Soldier killed as gunmen attack Jonathan's residence

Three others die Military vows to track attackers APC, PDP, IYC seek probe

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Mike Odiegwu, Yenagoa, Bolaji Ogundele and Tony Akowe, Abuja

PRESIDENT Muhammadu Buhari on Tuesday called his predecessor Dr Goodluck Jonathan to sympathise with him over the attack on his Otuoke country home in Bayelsa State.

Senior Special Assistant to the President on Media and Publicity, Mallam Garba Shehu, said in a statement that the President reassured Dr Jonathan that his administration was committed to his and Nigerians' safety.

President Buhari commiserated with the families of a soldier killed during the attack and those injured during the attack.

The statement reads: “In the telephone conversation, President Buhari expressed sadness over the tragic and unfortunate attack, during which a gallant soldier lost his life.

“While commending the soldiers on guard for bravely repelling the attack, the President condoled with family members as well as officers and men of the Nigerian Army over the loss of one of the guards.

“President Buhari assured that the protection of the life of the former leader and all citizens of the country will continue to be the major preoccupation of his administration.”

Gunmen killed a soldier on guard at Dr Jonathan’s courtyard near a riverbank in Otuoke, Ogbia Local Government Area of Bayelsa State.

Multiple sources said about three of the gunmen were shot dead by the soldiers, who foiled their attempt to break into the house.

It was gathered that Jonathan left Otuoke for Yenagoa, the state capital, a few hours before the gunmen came through the river in five speedboats and opened fire.

One of the sources said: “Armed men who came in about five boats attacked the home of former President Jonathan.

“A security personal attached to the former president was killed and about three of the gunmen were shot dead.”

An Ogbia youth leader, who preferred not to be named for safety reasons, described the attack on Jonathan’s house as disturbing.

He, however, said soldiers, whose checkpoint was located at the waterside, quelled the attack; unfortunately one of them died in the process.

A kinsman of the former President, Wisdom Ikuli urged President Buhari to initiate a thorough investigation to ascertain the reason behind the attack and to bring the culprits to justice.

He said: “Although their exact mission was not too clear, it was either an attempt to assassinate the former President or to rob the house.

“This is a great test for the entire Ijaw nation. Our great people must come together to unravel the forces behind this ugly incident and ensure that drastic measures are taken as a deterrence.”

But Jonathan, in a statement by his media adviser, Ikechukwu Eze, said the attackers came to steal a gunboat stationed 100 meters away from his residence.

He said: “A security post stationed near the Otuoke residence of former President Jonathan was attacked by unknown gunmen early Tuesday morning.

“The hoodlums, who came in about five engine boats, stormed the security post located about 100 metres away from former President Jonathan’s residence in his hometown Otuoke by 1:30 am on Tuesday.

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“They attempted to take away a gunboat belonging to the military stationed at the creek beside the residence. They were, however, resisted by gallant soldiers who engaged them in a firefight.

“The gunmen who couldn’t stand the firepower of the military were forced to beat a retreat. One soldier, unfortunately, lost his life in the fight while another was injured.

“One soldier, who is currently receiving treatment at a medical facility in Yenagoa, is in a stable state.

“The former President, who was not in Otuoke at the time of the attack, however, returned to his village early this (Tuesday) morning to assess the situation.

“Dr Jonathan promptly condemned the attack and reassured his people that there was no cause for alarm.

“The former President has also condoled with the family of the deceased soldier and the military and has urged the concerned security authorities to swing into action and bring the culprits to book.”

The military Joint Task Force (JTF), Operation Delta Safe (ODS), vowed to unmask the identities of gunmen.

Its spokesman, Major Jonah Unuakhalu, said the incident occurred at about 3 am on Tuesday.

He regretted that while repelling the attack, a soldier died; another was injured but was responding to treatment.

He said: “The vigilant troops repelled the attack while some of the assailants escaped with gunshot wounds. However, during the attack, one soldier paid the supreme price and another was wounded in action.

“The wounded has been evacuated to the hospital and is responding to treatment. Preliminary investigation is ongoing to identify the persons or groups behind the attack.

“The people are advised to go about their lawful businesses as the security of lives and properties are a priority to Operation Delta Safe during the Yuletide and beyond.”

The All Progressives Congress (APC), in a statement by its National Publicity Secretary Mallam Lanre Issa-Onilu, urged security and intelligence agencies to launch “a swift, sweeping and thorough probe of the shocking incident”.

“The APC joins other well-meaning Nigerians in condemning the attack in its entirety. We call on security agencies to fish out the perpetrators and their sponsors.

“We extend condolences to the family of the soldier who reportedly died in the attack. The Party also wishes the other injured soldier a full and speedy recovery,” the APC said.

The Ijaw Youths Council (IYC) worldwide condemned the attack, saying it suspects an assassination attempt on Jonathan.

Its President, Eric Omare, asked security agencies to bring the attackers to justice.

Omare said: “The circumstances of the attack, especially because the former President just left his house before the attack, clearly shows that the attackers were out to assassinate the former President.

“This is unacceptable to the Ijaw youth and Ijaw nation in general. The perpetrators must be brought to book. We sympathise with the family of the soldier killed during this dastardly attack.

“The IYC calls on the security agencies to, as a matter of urgency, take all necessary steps to bring to justice those behind this despicable attack.”