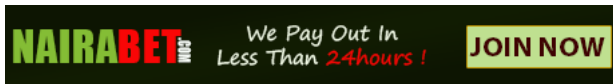


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4 feared dead as soldiers, militants clash in Rivers community (/4-feared-dead-as-soldiers-militants-clash-in-rivers-community)

February 23, 2016

4 feared dead as soldiers, militants clash in Rivers community •Traditional ruler, MOSOP flay soldiers' invasion •Military presence to enhance security —Wike •Our operation targeted at notorious ex-militant —Brigade commander

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Here's what she thinks, but
don't take her word for it



NO fewer than four persons reportedly dropped dead during a clash that broke out between soldiers and militants in Yeghe Community in Gokana and Bori, the headquarters of Khana Local Government Area of Rivers State, Monday night.

Nigerian Tribune gathered that there was a shoot-out between the military men and the militants, following an alleged invasion and setting ablaze of the home of a former militant, Mr Solomon Ndigbara, in the community.

According to the media aide to the former militant leader, Dum Nwine, nobody knew the whereabouts of Ndigbara, who was around when the soldiers stormed the community.

Enraged by the military action, some ex-militants in the area were said to have had resorted to mob action, even as it was gathered that residents had deserted the community as the shooting raged and scores injured.

The fracas, which started from Yeghe, spilled over to Bori, where the ex-militants set fire on the campaign office of Senator Magnus Abe, the candidate of the All Progressives Congress (APC) for the South-East senatorial rerun election scheduled for March 19, 2016.

The shootings, however, became aggravated, on Tuesday, leading to the temporary closure of the Ken Saro-Wiwa Polytechnic, Bori, as students were asked to remain indoor to avert further damages.

Effort to reach the Public Relations Officer (PRO) of the institution to speak on the situation proved abortive as his telephone numbers could not be reached, as of press time.

At the moment, the two communities remain calm, as residents of the areas flee their homes to neighbouring communities for safety, even a source in the area, who did not want his name mentioned, disclosed that two soldiers were reportedly gunned down during the raid, on Monday night.

The source also said the casualties recorded by the military prompted the gun exchange that lasted till Tuesday afternoon, adding that the shooting was heavy and ear-deafening.

Meanwhile, the paramount ruler of Yeghe Community, His Royal Highness Mene Baridam, has condemned the killing of two soldiers and other innocent Ogonis in Bori and Yeghe communities.

Speaking through his aide, Mr Confidence Ati, the traditional ruler expressed sadness over the destruction of properties belonging to the people of Ogoniland.

He called on the Chief of Army Staff and the Rivers State government to intervene to stop further destruction of lives and property in the area, stressing that Ogoni was a peaceful nation that should not be turned into a war zone.

Similarly, Senator Abe has appealed to his supporters in Rivers South-East senatorial district not to retaliate the attack on his Senatorial Liaison Office at Bori.

He said the appeal became necessary to avert further bloodshed, wanton destruction of property and anarchy in the area and also sympathised with families that lost their people in the attack.

Similarly, the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP) has expressed outrage and condemned what it termed the invasion of Ogoni communities, allegedly by the Nigerian military and demanded the immediate withdrawal of the invading soldiers.

MOSOP, in a statement issued on Tuesday, by its publicity secretary, Fegalo Nsuke, alleged that the military had extended the violence to Bori, shooting indiscriminately and advancing into adjoining communities, including Zaakpon.

"The shooting, which is ongoing, had saddeningly (sic) seen to the cold-blooded murder of innocent persons, infliction of serious gunshot injuries on others, paralysis of activities in the Ogoni capital and its environs, as well as arbitrary arrests, thereby forcing natives and residents to flee for safety," the statement read.

MOSOP also averred that the military had carried out similar invasions in Yeghe and Alode in Eleme Local Government Areas, earlier in the month, resulting in the killing of three persons and injuring several others.

"We consider as extremely disappointing and unfortunate these unprovoked military violence against our people, which betrays repressively sinister motive and reminiscent of our sad past.

"We find it difficult to rationalise the wisdom in this military campaign, cruelly motivated by hidden and evil intent. No matter what may be adduced to have informed this appalling military approach, violence in our view, can not provide the necessary solution to civil issues but dialogue...

"The military must, therefore, tread cautiously and maintain its independence and professionalism, as well as resist attempts by desperate politicians to drag them into the murky waters of politics, including being used to commit human rights abuses," the statement further read.

However, Governor Nyesom Wike has called on all fleeing residents of Khana and Gokana Local Government Areas to return to their homes, saying the heavy military presence in the areas was aimed at promoting security of lives and property and not to harm law-abiding people.

The governor, in a statement issued by his media aide, Simeon Nwakaudu, said his administration would always enhance the security of all residents of the state, urging the people of the two local government areas to cooperate with the security agencies to maintain law and order.

In the same vein, the Nigerian Army has said its operation in Yeghe community, on Monday, was largely focused on rooting out notorious ex-militant leader, Solomon Ndigbara.

Addressing newsmen in Port Harcourt, on Tuesday, Commander of the 2 Brigade, Brigadier-General Stevenson Olabanji, said there was no loss of life during the operation.

"Around 12 noon, on Monday, we received reports of gun fire in Yeghe community, Gokana Local Government Area and immediately dispatched my commanding officer to investigate the incident.

"On reaching the house of Solomon Ndigbara, who had been declared wanted by the army for gun-running, some hoodlums fired at the commanding officer (with intent to kill).

"The attack on the commanding officer led to a gun battle between our forces and hoodlums which resulted in them (hoodlums) being chased out from the community.

"We learnt that the hoodlums who

fled Yeghe community later went to Bori community in Khana Local Government Area and burnt down a campaign office belonging to the APC.

"We have assessed the situation in Bori community and currently conducting a stabilisation operation with focus to arrest criminals who committed that heinous crime. No soldier was killed or sustained gunshot injury nor was there anybody (civilian) killed during the operation," he said.

Brigadier Olabanji denied the accusations that the army was being used by some powerful individuals and groups to influence political interest in the state, saying "such an accusation is a propaganda from the pit of hell as no personnel in the Brigade would be involved in such sleazy activities."

He also paraded seven suspected cultists accused of masterminding the killings of about 25 people in Omoku community in Ogba/Egbema/Ndoni Local Government Area of the state, about two weeks ago.

He said the vehicle used by the suspected cultists had been recovered, adding that the suspects had provided useful information to aid further investigation.

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