

3 bodies found ashore after boat accident in Bayelsa

THREE bodies have been recovered from Thursday's boat accident at the Yenagoa-Brass Waterway in Bayelsa State.

Initial reports had stated that occupants of a passenger boat that capsized near Okoroma in Nembe Local Government Area of Bayelsa State swam to safety.

The reports said a cargo boat that was also involved in the accident sank.

However, Chairman of the Bayelsa State chapter of the Maritime Workers Union, Mr Ipigansi Ogoniba, updated the **News Agency of Nigeria (NAN)** about the accident on Saturday in Yenagoa, the state capital.

He said the accident involved only the cargo boat, which had an encounter with high waves.

Mr Ogoniba added that preliminary investigations showed that the cargo boat, MV Tari, had at least 100 passengers on board when the accident occurred, but some of the passengers swam to safety.

He expressed regrets that passengers boarded cargo boats that had no provisions for comfort and safety so as to pay cheap fares.

"The local boats are designed for heavy cargo and not for passengers, but people smuggle themselves into these boats and pay very cheap fares to operators.

"Unfortunately, the regulation on the use of safety jackets is weak. The boats are not primarily meant for passengers; there is no manifest to ascertain the exact number of passengers on board.

"The captain of the boat estimated that about 100 passengers were on board and we found that the load it carried was not balanced. The practice is to put heavy loads in the lower compartment and the lighter ones on top.

"We learnt that the operator did not follow this rule and made the boat vulnerable to high or turbulent waves," Ogoniba said.

He noted that statutory regulatory agencies had ab-

dicated their operational safety roles and left the regulation of the marine transport sector to the Maritime Workers Union.

Ogoniba said it normally took 24 hours after a boat accident for drowned victims to float.

He, however, told NAN that one of the three corpses recovered, a woman, had been identified by relatives who took the remains to a mortuary in Yenagoa, while the two other victims, both males, were yet to be identified.

The police spokesman in the state, SP AsinimButswat, confirmed the accident but said the casualty figure had yet to be ascertained as of the time of filing this report.