

Robbers on Rampage in Rivers

**Kill policemen, cart away millions*

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There was tension and anxiety among Isiokpo residents in Ikwerre Local Government Area of Rivers State recently, when robbers struck the United Bank for Africa (UBA) branch, killing a policeman, while millions of naira was allegedly taken away.

Eyewitness account told Niger Delta STANDARD that the incident, which took place at about 11.00am, took the bank employers, residents and traffic in the area by surprise.

A woman, who own a provision shop opposite the UBA Bank, 'Mama Success', told our correspondent that while she was in her shop, she saw a huge looking man shooting.

She said the heavy sound of the gun saw all in the area scampering for safety.

She further said she ran into her shop but the heavy bombardment gave an impression that the robbers may have taken strategic positions.

Another woman who gave her name as 'Mrs Rebecca' lamented what she called the

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frequent attacks on the UBA Bank in Isiokpo.

Mrs. Rebecca said it was painful to see the intestine of the policeman, who she said may have come from the northern par of the country, on the floor.

She said what was more painful was the heavy bullet shots the robbers gave the policeman on the head and on his chest; resulting to his death on the spot.

Another eyewitness, who refused to identify himself, informed that the robbers took siege of Isiokpo Community, as they attacked the bank, while on their escape; the witness account said the robbers were seen carrying '2 Ghana Must Go bags' suspected to be loaded with money.

When Niger Delta STAN-DARD got to the bank, at Isiokpo, hours after, the bank was under luck and key.

Some security officers at the gate refused to talk to anybody, perhaps still under tension.

Efforts made to speak to the manager of the bank proved abortive.

But unconfirmed sources at the bank said the robbers may have carted away unspecified million of naira.

At the Ikwere Local Government council premises, a staff told Niger Delta STANDARD that the council boss, his deputy, and the secretary were unavailable in their offices at the time of the incident.

But we were reliably informed that following the heavy bombardment by the robbers, the council staff

were thrown into anxiety; while many ran into nearby bush to take cover.

Sources said that the robbers on arrival at Isiokpo went straight to the base of police detachment where some of them were purported to be the playing draft.

The robbers opened fire, which killed one of the policemen, leaving some other policemen escaping in bullet wounds.

The robbers' invasion on the bank, Niger Delta STAN-DARD learnt, is an attack too often.

Only last year, the bank was said to have been attacked for over 3 times, each leaving a policeman dead.

Some concerned citizens of Isiokpo, who witnessed the

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escape, said the robbers may have escaped through the 'Obele Road Junction', which lead to Emohia.

There is call by aggrieved Isiokpo citizens on the local government council, the police and the bank to take precautionary measures to address the problems of frequent robbery attacks.

Business activities in Isiokpo according to a source is said to be at a slow pace since after the attack on UBA Bank.

Effort made to confirm the incident from the Police Public Relation Officer (PPRO), Mrs. Ireju Barasua, proved abortive, as her phone ran repeatedly without any response.

This was coming on the heels of repeated armed robbery attacks in major banks in Port Harcourt, Rivers State.

On Friday last week, armed hoodlums struck at Rumupirikom branch of First Inland Bank, Port Harcourt with the mission of gaining access to the cash vault. According to eyewitness accounts, the robbers who were armed to the teeth

arrived in a convoy of vehicles and condoned off the surrounding streets on the morning of that very day.

Sporadic gunshots were fired into the sky to pave way for the operation.

However, men of the Rivers State Police Command, who were hinted of the incident, responded rapidly and engaged the criminals in an exchange of gun fire in the ensuing battle, two of the robbers were gunned down as they flee through the waterfront nearby from where they have come.

An anonymous source however told our correspondent that the robbers disposed some customers in the bank of their money including a lady who came with about N2 million. Niger Delta STANDARD staff who witnessed the incident explained that instead of the police men in the Kala Police Station coming to their rescue, they were running helter skelter.

She disclosed that one of the policemen ran into a gutter and decided to take refuge there.

Confirming the incident, Rivers State Commissioner

of Police, Felix Ogbandu, explained that two of the bandits were killed.

He equally stated that another civilian who reported the matter to the Olusegun Obasanjo police station and two naval personnel were killed by the fleeing robbers. Ogbandu confirmed also that dynamite was thrown into the bank's premises by the men of the underworld.

He disclosed that policemen have been put on red alert and that the command has scheduled a meeting with the various banks in the state to fashion out effective means of securing them.

Before this time, dare devil armed robbers had attacked UBA Plc Olusegun Obasanjo Avenue and Fidelity Bank Plc both in Port Harcourt.

In similar vein, a robbery incident that left many injured took place at Intercontinental Bank located on the campus of Bori Polytechnic, last Friday. Our source said gun shots that heralded the men of the underworld were first heard from a distance, which some students erroneously described as toy guns.

Shortly after, the robbers

stormed the bank premises and started shooting sporadically. Our source said many of the polytechnic students who were inside the bank premises there to pay their school fees were commanded to lie face down, while they were dispossessed of their school fees and handsets.

Niger Delta STANDARD learnt that the bank Manager was shot and some students who put up resistance also received injuries from stray bullets.

Silver Ekiribi, an undergraduate Diploma student of the Polytechnic said that the Intercontinental Bank on campus just re-opened for business about three days before the robbery incident.

Meanwhile, most banks in Port Harcourt metropolis had earlier closed to the public in protest against incessant robbery incidents in the state capital.

Also, early in February, two policemen including four civilians were allegedly dispatched to their early graves when armed hoodlums raided some branches of UBA and EcoBank in Omuku, Rivers State.