

# Militants threaten fresh attacks on oil facilities

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**M**ILITANTS in the Niger Delta, on Tues-

day, accused the multinational ChevronTexaco Nigeria of using the military to attack Ijaw villages.

They threatened fresh

attacks against the company's interest anywhere in Nigeria if the "incessant harassment" was not stopped forthwith.

But the oil firm, on Tuesday night, restated its belief in reaching an understanding with the militants

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through dialogue. The company said it had always advocated dialogue as the only tool for conflict resolution in the Niger Delta.

The *Agence France Presse* reported the militants as calling on the international community and the Federal Government to immediately call ChevronTexaco Nigeria to order.

In a statement by one of their umbrella bodies, the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta, they said the call was necessitated by their discovery of a fresh plot by the

military to attack the Ijaw community of Gbaramatu.

The group said in the statement, "We are advising ChevronTexaco and the Nigerian military to desist from the planned invasion of any Ijaw community, because it will be definitely crushed with dire consequences by our movement with our native military capabilities."

The group recalled that an attack by the military in February made the militants to kidnap nine expatriate oil workers, who were released after several days in captivity.

Two weeks ago, four

naval officers escorting a convoy of boats working for Chevron were killed by militants near Chanomi creek in Delta State.

No group claimed responsibility for the attack, but the MEND made a veiled reference to the attack on Tuesday, saying, "We express our condolence to the families of the naval officers that lost their lives."

The statement added, "The wives and family members of all military personnel should discourage their husbands from accepting postings to the Niger Delta until the demand for equity and justice is ad-

dressed by the Federal government."

The group reiterated its "determination and commitment" to the emancipation of the Niger Delta.

Some 25 security personnel have been killed since January when militants seeking the control of the country's multi-billion-dollar oil and gas resources launched attacks on oil firms and personnel in the region.

At least 32 expatriate oil workers have also been kidnapped, but all have been released unharmed after days or weeks in captivity.

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The unrest has led to a 25-percent cut in oil exports from Nigeria, Africa's largest producer and the world's sixth largest crude exporter.

When contacted, Chevron's acting General Manager, Government and Public Affairs, Mr. Deji Haastrup, said, "We have recieved a letter from a faceless group threatening our operations."

He said that the company was surprised by the threat as it had always advocated dialogue as the only tool for conflict resolution in the Niger-Delta.

"Despite the threat, we do not expect the situation to escalate. We are still confident that dialogue will ease the tension and allow peace to prevail," Haastrup added.

Meanwhile, the Bayelsa

State Government has alleged that militants planned to blow up oil installations in the state.

The state's Deputy Governor, Mr. Peremobowei Ebebi, told journalists in Yenagoa, on Tuesday, that the militants also intended to destabilise the state in order to create the impression that the administration of Dr. Goodluck Jonathan was ineffective.

Ebebi, who claimed that the militants were being sponsored by unnamed Bayelsa citizens, warned that the government would deal with anyone caught fomenting trouble in the state.

He said, "We are tired of begging criminals. The sponsors are from this state (Bayelsa) and their target is

oil installations.

"We have credible information and security reports to the effect that the freelance group has concluded arrangements to kidnap expatriates in the creeks of Bayelsa. The boys have already collected mobilisation fee from their sponsors.

"When citizens are kidnapped or attacked, government has a duty to negotiate. Since it is clear that the kidnappers want to be wasting our time, we will stop negotiating with them."

Ebebi said security agents were on the trail of the militants. He appealed to Bayelsans and other indigenes of the Niger Delta not to allow criminals in their midst.