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JTF: Three chiefs murdered in Rivers

Ibanga Isine, Port Harcourt

Suspected cultists on Thursday murdered three community leaders in Ogbogoro, a village in Obio Akpor Local Government Area of Rivers State.

They were accused of facilitating the arrest of their colleagues by the Joint Task Force in the Niger Delta region.

A source told our correspondent that some cultists were rounded up by the community and handed over to the JTF on Tuesday.

A local broadcast media had on Wednesday, in its news bulletin, reported the handing over of some cultists to security operatives in Obio Akpor Local Government Area.

But a source from the community said that the cultists, who escaped before the arrival of troops, later re-grouped and attacked the people at around 4pm.

He said that the killers came to the community when they realised that the JTF troops had left and unleash terror on the people.

The source said, "Nobody knows where they came from. We started running immediately we heard sporadic gunshots everywhere.

"We have never seen this kind of thing before. They went round searching for leaders of the community and killed three that were found in their homes."

The Rivers State Commissioner of Police, Mr. Felix Ogbaudu, said that he was aware of the crisis in Ogbokoro but was not in a position to confirm the killing of the community leaders.

He said that the JTF has dispatched soldiers to the affected community to assist the police in restoring law and order.

Meanwhile, the Nigerian Army on Thursday warned soldiers involved in security duty in Port Harcourt, the Rivers State capital, against maltreating civilians in the course of their operation.

The Chief of Army Staff, Lt.-Gen. Lukas Yusuf, said this while addressing officers and men of the Joint Task Force at the 2nd Brigade of the Nigerian Army.

Yusuf, who was accompanied by the Chief of Air Staff, Air Marshal Paul Dike, stressed that the military authorities would not tolerate the harassment of civilians by troops deployed to assist in keeping the peace in the state.

He regretted that many of the troops had attempted to drag the good image of the military in the mud by engaging in what he called unprofessional conducts and actions inimical to the very essence of the force.

Yusuf noted, "Reports of indiscipline amongst the troops have reached us and we are very unhappy with the conduct of some of the troops. But I am using this opportunity to warn that any time we hear of any further harassment or maltreatment of the civil populace, we shall come here and take very decisive actions against those involved in such acts.

"You have no right, whatsoever, to intimidate or molest innocent civilians by forcing them to raise their hands even when it is not necessary. You were deployed here to assist them but not to add to their problems."