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Pirates attack 16 fishing vessels, kill two crew members

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The fishing industry on Saturday experienced a major upheaval as pirates attacked 16 ocean-going fishing trawlers belonging to four fishing companies in one night.

The incident, which occurred off Calabar/ Bonny River and adjacent Oceanic Waters, left two crewmembers dead, with 40 others injured.

The Nigerian Trawler Owners Association, which disclosed this in a statement on Sunday, called on the Federal Government to "urgently intervene and save the industry as it is on the verge of collapse."

NITOA, in the statement signed by its Executive Secretary, Dr. M. C. Bissong, and made available to our correspondent on Sunday, said goods worth N120m were carted away, with damages to the vessels estimated at over N520m.

Bissong, who described the pirates as fully armed with sophisticated weapons including explosives, said the pirates' siege had become recurrent in recent times, making the industry one of the most endangered sectors in the country.

He said, "The pirates carted away high value seafood products and electronic equipment and devices on board the vessels. They even took away personal effects belonging to crew members after grilling, killing and terrorising the crew, which resulted in the death of two of the members. To prevent the trawlers from communicating, they even destroyed the remaining electronics on board including several gadgets."

He added that 40 crew members, including Nigerian and foreign nationals, were left seriously maimed and injured at the end of the attack.

The body recalled that two weeks earlier, there were reports of similar multiple attacks by pirates on fishing trawlers, which also resulted in the death of a number of crew members

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death of a number of crew members.

According to Bissong, "At that time, a similar number of fishing trawlers had been attacked in the space of two weeks. This time, however, all the attacks took place within a span of 24 hours. Further, the modus operandi of the pirates was highly tactical and more daring.

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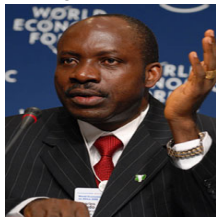
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