

11 soldiers feared killed by MEND

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ANOTHER tragedy may have befallen the Nigerian Armed Forces as the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta on Monday claimed it killed 11 soldiers in Degema. Local Government Area of Rivers State.

The Joint Task Force, otherwise known as Operation Restore Hope in the Niger Delta, denied the claim but confirmed that MEND blew up a major oil pipeline belonging to the Shell Petroleum Development Company near Awobi

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know their rights. If people dont know their rights, they will be cheated to the point of taking poison in place of good drugs.

“We are going to work with you, The Nigerian Human Rights Commission, and even other anti-corruption agencies to make sure that the rights of people are protected and strengthened.”

Schuttleworth, who said she was in Nigeria to seek collaboration with several religious bodies and government agencies in charge of human rights, added that she needed the support of NAFDAC in the area of drug abuse.

She said though there was no quick fix means to solve the issues of drug abuse and trafficking, she would implore NAFDAC and other related agencies not to relent in the campaign against fake drugs.

Flow Station in Degema.

MEND had in an e-mail statement to THE PUNCH in Port Hacourt, said its ‘detonation engineers’, backed by heavily armed fighters, carried out the attack on the SPDC facility in the early hours of Monday.

The statement was issued shortly before President Umaru Yar’Adua expressed hope that the Niger Delta Master Plan would end the rising agitation for resource control by indigenes of the oil-rich region.

According to the statement by Mr. Jomo Gbomo, MEND’s engineers and fighters encountered a military gunboat which immediately opened fire on them.

Gbomo, who is the spokesman of MEND said, “Minutes after the sabotage, our fighters encountered a military gunboat which opened fire blindly on the advance guard.

“We flanked them in a counter-attack and killed in close combat, all the drunken soldiers numbering 11, collecting their weapons, ammunitions and bullet-proof vests before using dynamite to sink the gunboat with its dead occupants.

“The two traumatised adolescent girls found in the company of the soldiers were hurt, not from the skirmish, but from gang rape by the soldiers of the Nigerian Army.

“They were dropped off in the neighboring village by our men who have since returned safely to camp.”

He said the attack was ‘dedicated’ to President Umaru Yar’Adua and Vice-President Goodluck Jonathan, who, according to the statement, had

failed to ensure peace, security and reconciliation in the Niger Delta.

But the spokesman for the JTF, Lt. Col. Sagir Musa, denied that any soldier was killed by MEND.

Musa, in a telephone interview with one of our correspondents, said reports available to the JTF indicated that a pipeline near Awoba Flow Station exploded in the early hours of Monday.

He said, “The area and flow station is not guarded by any armed security outfit. Therefore, the purported document in which MEND claimed responsibility for an encounter and subsequent killing of our soldiers is not only a lie but is also dubious and bunkum.

“There was no encounter before, along or after the general area where the flow station is located. How and where did they get the soldiers they claimed to have killed?”

Musa said it was strongly suspected that the attackers used explosives to blow up the pipeline.

When contacted, the SPDC’s Public Affairs Manager, Mr. Precious Okolobo, confirmed the attack on the facility which he called Nembe Creek trunk line.

He said, “An over-fly this (Monday) morning showed some oil had spilled into the environment; and we have mobilised equipment to contain further spread of oil. We have also cut back on some production to stop further spill.”

In Abuja, Yar’Adua told the new Ambassador of Denmark to Nigeria, Mr. Flemming Pedersen, that the implementation of the

Master plan, a 15-year development agenda, would remove the basis for the agitation in the Niger Delta.

“We already have a 15-year Master Plan for the comprehensive development of the Niger Delta region, and once this is implemented, the basis for the political agitation will no longer be there”, he said.

Yar’Adua also expressed reservations at the current nature of the agitation, saying it had become increasingly criminal.

He said that criminality and bunkering should be separated from genuine political agitation.

The President added that his administration had reached an advanced stage in truce talks with political, community leaders and militants in the region.

He told the ambassador, who presented his letter of credence, that Niger Delta was one of the priorities of his administration.

Earlier, the new Danish ambassador commended the President’s efforts towards achieving peace in the restive region, and requested for a reciprocal visit to his country by a Nigerian trade delegation next month.

Also on Monday, the President received the letter of credence from the new Singaporean ambassador to Nigeria, Mr. Shabbir Hassanbhai.

Yar’Adua informed the envoy that the Federal Government appreciates the technical cooperation between Sinagapore and Nigeria, especially in the area of training.