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## NUPENG embarks on strike over planned sack of members

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oil industry operations in the Niger Delta were paralysed on Wednesday as the National Union of Petroleum and Natural Gas Workers in the region embarked on a strike action.

The oil workers, who were protesting alleged plan by a contracting firm to the American oil giant, Chevron Nigeria Limited, Polmaz Limited, to lay off 122 workers for daring to join NUPENG, disrupted the operations of CNL in the Niger Delta on Wednesday.

Members of NUPENG from the Warri Zonal Council, made up of Bayelsa, Delta and Ondo states, participated actively in the industrial action.

The protesters, led by NUPENG's Warri Zonal Chairman, Mr. William Akporeha, besieged the headquarters of the field operations of CNL in the Niger Delta in Warri as early as 6am.

The NPA Expressway, leading to CNL's office, was barricaded with oil tankers mobilised from the Warri Unit of the Petroleum Tanker Drivers' Union.

Many oil tankers were also stationed at the main gate of the American oil giant, apparently to prevent workers and visitors from accessing the location.

CNL's employees, who turned up for their routines, were prevented from gaining access into the company's premises.

The union mobilised its members operating in the zone to the scene and chanted anti-Chevron songs and denounced the alleged anti-labour styles of the management of the company.

The action resulted in traffic snarls in Effurun, the headquarters of Uvwie Local Government Area of Delta State on Wednesday.

The nearby Warri Refinery Depot of the Pipelines and Products Marketing Company, a subsidiary of the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation, was deserted as the tanker drivers joined their colleagues in the action.

The officials of PPMC merely idled away as the tanker drivers shunned their normal duties.

The peaceful protest, however, assumed a worrisome trend when federal troops from the Joint Task Force in the Niger Delta, Operation Restore Hope, arrived the scene at about 8am.

The security agents, comprising regular and riot policemen as well as soldiers, invited by the CNL's management, manhandled the protesters.

The security operatives fired tear gas and beat up the protesters to disperse them. Many oil workers sustained injuries in the ensuing melee.

The leadership of NUPENG alleged that three members of the union were feared dead in the mayhem.

Akporeha, who was also allegedly beaten up by security operatives said, "We are here to tell Deltans and Nigerians of the police and soldiers' brutality on innocent Nigerians.

"NUPENG, today, as it is known in this country; is not a violent body; NUPENG is a

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peaceful body and we carried out our protest peacefully.”

Today, we are at Chevron's gate right now to protest CNL's management grand design to flush out NUPENG members in the company's operations. As we stand here talking to you, about 122 workers are on the firing line because they decided to join NUPENG and the management has said that they have no right to join NUPENG.

“We came here peacefully today with over 100 trucks to barricade CNL's entrance and the major NPA Expressway to register our protest, but Chevron gave the security operatives shoot-at-sight order. A soldier told me that they were just having pity on us that the order that they received was to shoot us at sight.

According to him, “As you can see all over the place, you can see serious molestation of innocent workers who have come here to protest peacefully about their rights. This issue has been lingering on for the past three years. We have tried to engage Chevron in peaceful discussions without protest, but they have continued to hold on to their guns that these workers cannot join NUPENG.”







“The action of the security operatives against us today is not the best, we were beaten up, they broke our heads with their guns and right now, I cannot hear with one of my ears again. We had injuries all over. About two of our drivers are at the hospital right now; in fact, they are on a danger list and a report has just come to me that three of our members lost their lives as they were shot without having mercy on us.”

But CNL's General Manager, Government and Public Affairs, Mr. Femi Odumabo, who confirmed the protest, said no life was lost, adding that CNL was not directly involved in the face-off.

Odumabo, in a telephone interview, said it was a disagreement over the right of the workers of Polmaz to join a trade union of their choice, adding that the issue was being amicably resolved among the stakeholders.

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