

JTF deploys troops in oil community over clash

Simon Utebor, Yenagoa

THE Joint Military Task Force in the Niger Delta, *Operation Pulo Shield*, headquartered in Yenagoa, Bayelsa State, has deployed troops in Ibaa, Emohua Local Government Area, Rivers State.

The deployment followed the vandalism of oil pipelines by hoodlums as a result of the intra-communal crisis that has torn the community apart.

It was learnt that the crisis, which was triggered by a chieftaincy tussle, had heightened insecurity in the community since January 2014.

It was further learnt that no fewer than three persons had allegedly been killed in the mayhem.

The situation was said to have paralysed communal and social activities in Ibaa as schools, hospitals and markets had been closed down.

Also, many residents had fled the community to take refuge in neighbouring communities.

Sources claimed two rival cult groups, the Islanders and Icelanders, sympathetic to opposing camps in the chieftaincy tussle, had cashed in on the crisis to terrorise the people of the community in addition to looting, raping and damaging property, particularly at nights.

The JTF, which conducted journalists round the crisis-torn community on Wednesday, explained that the soldiers were deployed there because the hoodlums had been involved in various crimes including breaking of oil pipelines.

Spokesman for the security outfit, Lt. Col. Mustapha Anka, said, "You have seen that the community is being deserted. The Commander of the JTF, Maj. Gen. Emmanuel Atewe, was here on Saturday in company with other component heads of the JTF.

"Already, military personnel have been deployed in the community to ensure that peace and normalcy returns."

He said the JTF was working in collaboration with other security agencies to restore peace and check hoodlums' nefarious activities in the community.

He confirmed that intelligence indicated that members of the two rival cult groups were "involved in criminal activities including pipeline vandalism and oil theft."

Narrating his ordeal, an indigene of the community, Ndubuisi Mbadike, alleged that the hoodlums looted and damaged his store.

He said it was providence that saved him on the day they struck.

"They damaged my only store. In fact, it was only God that saved me. Everybody has run away from the community. All these women you are seeing here only came to do small work. In the evening, they will run to other communities because they (the cultists) rape people's wives," Mbadike lamented.

He appealed to the government to establish a police station in Ibaa, stressing that it would bring about permanent security to the community.

Corroborating Mbadike, the Central Peoples Democratic Party chairman in Ibaa clan, Sunday Amadi, said a prominent chief of the community was among those killed in the clash.