

# One feared dead as Rivers pirates hijack boats

Dennis Naku, Port Harcourt

A female passenger was feared dead after suspected pirates hijacked two boats along the waterways of Rivers State on Monday.

The passengers were said to be travelling from Abonema to Kula both in the Akuku-Toru Local Government Area of the state when the pirates struck mid-sea.

The Maritime Workers Union said the boats were each conveying 12 passengers, most of who jumped into the river in a bid to escape abduction.

The state Chairman of the Nigeria Maritime Workers Union, Israel Pepple, confirmed the incident on Tuesday.

Pepple expressed worry that attacks along the waterways have resurfaced.

He said, "My unit chairman in Abonema and that of the Kula unit called to my attention that two of their boats were hijacked by pirates.

"The information they gave us initially was that a lady was also taken away out of the 24 passengers.

"But around noon, they called

back to inform me that the lady was dead and that she was floating on the water.

"They later went and carried her corpse. As I speak with you, her corpse is in Abonema and they have reported the matter to the Marine Police in Abonema."

He appealed to the state governor, Siminialayi Fubara, to prioritise security along the waterways.

He added, "For now, we are talking about security. You have to secure the waterways. The waterways must be secured for us, our passengers and goods to move.

"That is the most important thing. So let them beef up the security. We need more gunboats and we need increased security patrol from the joint task force, especially the checkpoints."

When contacted, the state Police Public Relations Officer, Grace Iringe-Koko, confirmed the incident, saying an investigation was ongoing.

"Yes, we are aware, but there is no arrest for now. An investigation is ongoing to apprehend the culprits and make them face the law," she stated.