

Rivers protesters barricade NLNG office over fisherman's death

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Map of Rivers State

By Dennis Naku

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Protesting youths from Ogu/Bolo community in Rivers State have sealed the premises of the Nigeria Liquefied Natural Gas along Amadi-ama in Port Harcourt, the state capital, for two days following the death of a fisherman on the waterways.

The protesters under the aegis of Concerned Ogu/Bolo residents and Fishermen from Amadi-ama, along with the mother of the deceased alleged that the company's vessel sank boats belonging to fishermen and destroyed their fishing nets along the NLNG sea routes resulting to the death of the 27-year-old Precious Imabibo, who was fishing on the river on January 20.

Following the protest, the company's workers were forced to beat a retreat as they could not access the gate due to the presence of the angry youths who had sealed the entrance and refused any entrance.

Also, travellers ferrying through the NLNG jetty to Bonny Island were stranded as they could not embark on their journey due to the protest which continued for two days running.

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The leader of the protesters, Cyril Diamond, while speaking to newsmen on Tuesday said since the incident the company had not done anything to the respite of those who suffered losses.

Diamond alleged the company had turned down all avenues for dialogue, adding that a series of letters to get the company had not been responded to.

He vowed that they would not open the company's gate until their demands were met, noting that the company had refused to enter into a proper agreement with the community on how their vessels would be plying the sea routes without causing havoc.

Diamond stated, "We have written them (NLNG) a series of letters. We even wrote a letter to the Community Development Committee of Amadi-ama after our first protest on January 29, but they have not done anything.

“We now wrote a letter to the Rivers State Commissioner of Police and the police invited us through the State Intelligence Department. They also invited them (NLNG) but they refused to come.

“We even wrote to the Inspector General of Police and Amnesty International to come to our aid because the NLNG cannot be operating here and their activities are killing our people. We are going to remain here until the NLNG does the needful, even if it will take us one week. We will not only block here, we will block the route of the waterways.”

Her accused the NLNG of being insensitive even after its high-powered engine boats swept the fishermen’s canoes and destroyed their nets as their son drowned in the process.

On her part, the mother of the deceased, Blessing Imabibo, expressed annoyance over the attitude of the NLNG on the death of her son by keeping mum since the incident eight months ago.

The distraught woman said she had been sick since the passing of her son, but said the company had remained insensitive to her plight, noting that the deceased was the only helper she had.

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She stated, “This boy was the one helping me. So for somebody to take something very precious to one’s life is very bad and the way the company treated me was not good at all.

“I have been going from one police station to another, nothing has been done. My son died on January 20 and he would have been 28 years in March if he was alive.”

Imabibo further said, “I’m still calling on the government, the Rivers Commissioner of Police and other people to help. My son cannot die like that.”

But the NLNG in a statement by its General Manager, External Relations and Sustainable Development, Andy Odeh, said it was aware of the protest, saying the relevant stakeholders were being engaged towards an amicable resolution.

Odeh further said the NLNG placed priority on the safety and care of its people and host communities, even as he called for calm while awaiting the outcome of the police probe into the matter.

The two-paragraph statement entitled, ‘Protest at NLNG Corporate Head Office’ reads, “Nigeria LNG Limited is aware of a recurrence of a protest at its corporate head office in Port Harcourt by a group claiming to represent the family in an incident allegedly involving an NLNG chartered passenger boat along the Amadi Creek in January 2024.

“The NLNG confirms that relevant stakeholders are being engaged towards an amicable resolution. The company places a premium on the safety and care of its people and host communities, and calls for calm while awaiting the outcome of the Nigeria Police probe into the matter.”

When contacted, the spokesperson for the state police command, Grace Iringe-Koko, said the matter was being investigated, adding that the family of the deceased and the company were invited for a meeting.

She stated, “We are investigating the matter. Both parties were with us, the deceased family, the community and the company were all seated here with us (police) to discuss because the matter is under investigation.”

However, our correspondent, who later visited the scene of the protest, reports that as the situation heightened, a team of armed policemen arrived at the scene and sacked them.

About six police Hilux vans and over 25 operatives chased the protesters, as some fired teargas canisters into the air to disperse them.

The policemen seized the chairs and canopies mounted by the protesters at the company entrance with many of them fleeing the scene following the onslaught.

But like wounded soldiers, the protesters later regrouped at the premises, saying they would not be intimidated.