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## **NEWS:**

### **Gunmen hijack oil vessel** **...Hold 8 hostage**



Unknown gunmen on Monday hijacked an oil supply vessel belonging to West African Offshore on the Bonny River with eight crew members on board.

Nothing has, however, been heard of the whereabouts of the crew members said to be Nigerians since the attack.

Also, a prospective National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) member, whose identity is yet to be revealed, was kidnapped while her mother, a lecturer at the Rivers State University of Science and Technology, was going to drop her at Omagwa Airport on her way for the youth service.

The hijacked vessel was said to be returning from Agbami Field offshore when it allegedly ran into the hoodlums who fired at the vessel before they finally stopped it and hopped on it.

Details of the attack were still scanty at press time last night.

For instance, the group responsible for the attack remained unknown just as the fate of the crew members.

But no ransom demand has been made in respect of the kidnapped crew members. Spokesman of the Joint Task Force (JTF) in Rivers State, Lt. Col. Sagir Musa, who incidentally did not have much information on it confirmed the attack.

He said the incident took place specifically at Elem-Tombia in Degema Local Government Area of the state and suspected that the vessel had been moved without JTF

escorts.

Security sources said security agents could use the tracker on the vessel to locate where it is being held before any action could be taken to free it.

According a security alert, the boat said to be returning to Onne, Rivers State, was attacked around 2.40 pm and finally seized by an unknown group and that since the attack; no one knew the location of the vessel and the fate of those on board.

The alert said: "24 August, 2.40pm, WAO Benue, a supply boat returning from Agbami field to Onne hijacked at Port Harcourt-Bonny channel with eight national crew members on board. Vessel belongs to West African Offshore."

On the kidnapped prospective corps member, though the police said their attempt to speak with the mother of the girl had not been possible as she was yet to respond to police invitation.

Meanwhile, the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) has alleged that the House of Representatives has offered it a \$500,000 bribe for it to implicate Niger Dock on the allegation that the company is engaged in gun running.

Also, MEND has threatened to carry out a retaliatory attack on the JTF in Bayelsa State for the alleged killing of 12 passengers including students and children on Sunday along Yenagoa-Fropa road. MEND blamed the attack on the passenger boat on the JTF, saying the force opened fire on the boat because it claimed it heard a gun shot shortly before the boat appeared.

The organisation therefore called on the Bayelsa State Government to identify the families of the slain and pay them handsome compensation, promising to avenge the death of the innocent passengers.

MEND Spokesman, Gbomo Jomo, said: "A civilian commercial transport boat which plies the Yenagoa - Fropa (Southern Ijaw) route of Bayelsa State was attacked by men of the military Joint Task Force (JTF) on Sunday, August 24, 2008 by about 16.30 Hrs.

"The JTF's explanation of the attack, which led to the death of 12 passengers and one critically injured survivor made up of students, women and children was that they heard the sound of gunfire minutes before the emergence of the passenger boat.

"This unfortunate killing of innocent civilians again calls for the replacement of the military task force with the police in civilian areas. It is clear that the soldiers acted out of panic and indiscipline and may even have been drunk.

"MEND will not issue any threat over this painful waste of lives but will retaliate at the appropriate time before notifying the public.

"We call on the Bayelsa State Government to investigate the incident and compensate the families of the victims as soon as possible."

On the alleged bribe, MEND said the House allegedly offered it through an unnamed lawmaker who approached one of its top commanders on Friday, August 22, 2008, asking the group to implicate Niger Dock on the supply of hardware and navigational equipment used in attacking Bonga Field.

Jomo said the militant group did not take the offer seriously until the said contact paid a cash advance of \$200,000 Sunday night at 22.45 hours.

He said the group would not return the money but put it to better use.

The group alleged that the reason it would not participate in the frame up was that its own leader, Henry Okah, was being held on trumped up charges, adding that MEND's expectation was for the government to deny the allegation.

“The House of Representatives, through a member, proposed a bribe of \$500,000 (Five Hundred Thousand USD) to a top commander in the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) on Friday, August 22, 2008 desperately soliciting his help to implicate Niger Dock Plc as the supplier of arms and navigational equipment used in the attack on the Bonga off-shore oil rig.

“We did not take this man and his offer seriously until an advance sum of \$200,000.00 (Two Hundred Thousand USD) in cash was delivered to MEND camp late Sunday night, August 24 at 22.45 Hrs.

“MEND has no intention of returning the money, which will be put to better use and will not connive with the Nigerian government through its dishonourable lower House to perpetrate such a wicked and criminal conspiracy against an innocent company.

“This same government also fabricated trumped-up charges of gun running against Henry Okah and Edward Atatah, which led to their arrest in Angola on September 3, 2007.

Henry was accused of being behind a phantom coup in Equatorial Guinea and a fictitious large scale theft and supply of light and heavy weapons from the Nigerian Army armoury to militants in the Niger Delta for which a kangaroo trial in secret is on-going. “We expect the government to deny this allegation as usual, but the important thing is that today, MEND is proud to have stood on the side of justice, truth and integrity; virtues required in our fight to emancipate the Niger Delta from over 50 years of bondage.

“Yesterday, it was Henry Okah, and today it is Niger Dock. Who next will be accused tomorrow?” MEND queried.

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