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Nigeria: 18 soldiers feared killed in Niger Delta war

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Some 18 soldiers, including two officers and 16 rank and file, are missing in action and feared dead in the two-week-old military offensive in Nigeria's Niger Delta oil region, the military said.

Maj.-Gen. Sarkin-Yarki Bello, Commander of the military Joint Task Force (JTF) which is

behind the offensive, made the disclosure at a press conference in the oil city of Warri Monday.

He said eight other soldiers have been wounded in the fighting, with one of them dying on Sunday.

The Commander vowed that the offensive would continue for as long as it takes to know the whereabouts of the missing troops and to destroy militant camps in Delta state.

"The operation is still ongoing until we find the 18 missing troops, made up of two officers of the rank of Lieutenant in the Army and 16 soldiers, and bring those who are responsible for their fate to justice," Maj.-Gen. Sarkin-Yarki said.

According to Amnesty International, hundreds of civilians, mostly women and children, have either been killed or injured in the offensive, which has also trapped over 20,000.

The military has shrugged off accusations of engaging in indiscriminate aerial, sea and land bombardment of towns and villages in the state, saying it was conducting the operation with surgical precision.

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The militants, who have been routed from at least three camps in the state, have started fighting back in what they tagged "Blood Oil War", destroying key oil pipes that has forced Chevron to shut in 100,000 bpd on Monday.

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