

147 suspected militants killed in military operation in Lagos, Ogun creeks

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■ Bombing will continue until vandals are subdued, says Military

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ABOUT 147 suspected militants might have been killed in the ongoing joint military operation in riverine communities affected by recent spate of criminal attacks in Lagos and Ogun States.

The affected communities had come under the siege of hoodlums suspected to be Ijaw militants with about 50 residents reportedly killed in the past weeks while few others were kidnapped.

The development has led to the desertion of some of the affected communities by residents as many of them continued to leave in droves until last Thursday when the military commenced a raid on the camps of suspected militants. Speaking with *Sunday Sun* reporter, a local security source told our correspondent on phone that casualty recorded on the part of the militants as at yesterday afternoon might not be less than 150.

“The casualty as at yesterday as we were told was about 114 but this morning we heard that more of them have been killed and that the figure may be up to 150,” the source said. Asked if there was any incident involving civilian casualty, the source said: “I cannot say anything on that but all I know is that people have continued to leave some of these areas perhaps out of fear.” Lagos State police Public Relations Officer, Dolapo Badmos, a Superintendent of Police, on the other hand dismissed the fear of possibility of civilian casualty. “It is a wrong impression to be talking about civilian casualty because the operation is taking place deep in the creeks. It is not in the communities,” she said. Meanwhile, the Nigerian military has described as cheap propaganda, insinuations that its aerial bombardment at the Arepo area of Ogun State was on targets that were not pipeline vandals and militants. The Flag Officer Commanding Western Naval Command, Rear Admiral Ferguson Bobai who is the coordinator of the exercise said the targets that were destroyed by the military were carefully assessed using aerial surveillance technology mounted on the Nigerian Air Force aircraft involved in the operations.

He spoke to *Sunday Sun* on phone explaining that, “initially we were directed not to use air power, but when we carried out assessment of the area a lot of the vandal had moved from areas accessible by water to very difficult terrain. Following this development we returned to the Chief of Defence Staff, demanding that airpower is the only way for the vandals to be dislodged. And in using airpower just like I told you during the briefing we assessed the area and made sure that the targets are very ones that we needed to take out. “We have video recording from the surveillance aircraft and we also have still photos which were analysed properly and carefully before we commenced the operation. I must tell you that this is just propaganda to whip up sentiments.”

Admiral Bobai said the vandals are economic saboteurs and that the aerial bombardment would continue until the vandals are subdued.

“This evening we will deploy our surveillance aircraft to take shots of areas bombed and we will then analyse the photos and if there are still targets we need to take out, we will continue the bombing until the targets are completely taken out,” he noted.

He said that the bombardment was a directive of the Defence Headquarters and the need to bombard the area came following incidences of pipeline vandalisation, kidnapping and armed robbery.

Just last month, the military and component of the operation code-named Operation Awatse got directive from the Chief of Defence Staff, General Gabriel Olonisakin to carry out an operation in the general area of Arepo with a view to dismantling vandals camps and shanties scattered around Arepo, Ibafo, Ishawo and all the areas around that axis.