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**MEND declares war**

By CHRISTY ANYANWU

**Monday, September 15, 2008**

The Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) has declared an "oil war" in response to attacks the Joint military Task Force (JTF) launched against militants at the weekend.

The militant group in a press statement issued on Sunday said it had launched an operation code-named Hurricane Barbarossa, warning oil companies and foreign expatriates to move out of the region to avoid being caught in the war.

But the JTF has dismissed the MEND threat with a wave of hand, warning the group to desist from causing instability in the Niger Delta, as the Nigerian military would not abdicate its responsibility and allow the region to be held to ransom.

The MEND statement reads in parts: "Following a previous warning that any attack on our positions will be tantamount to a declaration of an oil war, the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) has declared an oil war in response to the unprovoked aerial and marine attacks on a MEND position in Rivers State of Nigeria on September 13, 2008 by the armed forces of Nigeria.

"About 0100 Hrs, today, September 14, 2008, Hurricane Barbarossa commenced with heavily armed fighters in hundreds of war boats filing out from different MEND bases across the Niger Delta in solidarity to carry out destructive and deadly attacks on the oil industry in Rivers state.

"By dawn, destroyed oil flow stations, gunboats, burst pipelines, dead



•Militant

Photo: Olufemi Kayode

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and injured soldiers trailed in the aftermath of the “hurricane.” Some specific locations include the Soku Gas Plant, Chevron Platform at Kula, over 22 well armed soldiers sent as reinforcement were intercepted, killed and dispossessed of their weapons, a major crude trunk pipeline at Nembe creek was blown up at several points.

“The operation will continue until the government of Nigeria appreciates that the solution to peace in the Niger Delta is justice, respect and dialogue. This military style bullying belongs to the past 50 years when the Niger Delta people responded only with their mouths, pens and placards.

“All international oil and gas loading vessels entering the region are warned to drop anchor in the high sea or divert elsewhere until further notice. Failure to comply is taking a foolhardy risk of attack and destruction of the vessel.

“Again, we are asking that oil companies evacuate their staff from their field facilities because the brief is not to capture hostages but to bring these structures to the ground”.

The group has also disclosed that the 27 oil workers it rescued from pirates who kidnapped them from the MT Blue Ocean were trapped in the camp they were kept as a fallout of the fight with the JTF. It said among the trapped oil workers are five expatriates from Britain, South Africa and Ukraine, while the remaining 22 are Nigerians. MEND appealed that the Red Cross or humanitarian workers such as the Doctors without borders be allowed passage to see the trapped oil workers as some of them were wounded as a result of the military attack.

The JTF told Niger Deltans to go about their normal business as the MEND and other militant groups did not pose any threat in the region. Lt. Col Chris Musa the commander of the JTF said the MEND could not match the force of the military located in various areas of the Niger Delta.

He said all his men were on red alert and would crush any MEND threat, adding that threat by MEND that it was attacking soldiers or would attack soldiers was an end signal of a group that had lost relevance.

Meanwhile, the Federal Government has been urged to probe the alleged invasion of Elem Tombia and two other communities in Rivers State by soldiers at the weekend in which no fewer than 15 persons including women and children were feared dead.

The JTF had alleged an unprovoked attack on its men on routine patrol by suspected militants for which the soldiers launched a counter attack. Making the probe call in a statement he issued on Sunday in Port Harcourt, the Member of the House of Representatives who represents the area, Dr. Sokonte Davies, accused the soldiers of attempting to create, “another Odi, Odiana and Umuechem” in the riverine community.

In his assessment of the incident that occurred 48 hours after two persons kidnapped in Port Harcourt were rescued in the community with the help of the natives, the action of the soldiers were akin to declaring “war against a peaceful people.” He saw the official explanation by the JTF as, “a blatant lie to cover wickedness” and demanded that those behind it should be punished and the victims rehabilitated.

“The Nigerian Armed Forces have stirred the hornets’ nest. The people of Tombia demand an immediate investigation of this action and bring the perpetrators to book since, if the spokesman for the JTF should be believed, this is an illegal action.

“They should also take immediate measures to rebuild the communities and make emergency arrangements to compensate all those who have suffered loss.”

Dr Davies talked about, “a high number of casualties, especially women and children and several persons missing,” while faulting the military action as ill-advised.

“We belief (sic) that if this a strategy to solve the Niger Delta problem, it was ill-advised. We hope that the Federal Government will show the necessary will to handle this matter adequately.”

Meanwhile, the JTF has hinted of a reprisal attack by militants following las Saturday’s incident.

The spokesman of the military outfit, Lt. Col. Musa, said in another interview that, “as anticipated, the bandits staged a flamboyant attack” between 3 am and 4 am at Soku oil facilities and Robertkiri community, The JTF commander stated that the soldiers guarding the facilities put up, “active resistance” and “successfully repelled the attack with casualties on the miscreants’ side.” According to him, a soldier was wounded in the latest attack.