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## Killing of 2 soldiers: Residents flee as Army set houses ablaze in Abia communities

**S**oldiers attached to the 144 Battalion, Asa in Ukwa West Local Government Area of Abia State have allegedly set homes ablaze in the oil and gas Kingdom of Owaza over the death of their colleagues.

New Telegraph learnt that gunmen suspected to be illegal oil bunkers on Monday night attacked three soldiers at a checkpoint near the oil pipeline between Owaza and Obuzor communities in Ukwa West killing two in the process.

Angered by the killing of their colleagues, the soldiers allegedly

stormed the community setting fire to houses, shops and any structure on sight.

Sources said that there is a mass exodus of people from Owaza, as residents have deserted the area even before the arrival of the rampaging soldiers who reportedly met empty buildings that they set ablaze.

As of the time of filing this report, the community is still de-

serted as residents abandoned their homes for fear of victimisation, torture, arrest or possible death.

The Oil and Gas rich Owaza is a boundary town between Abia and Rivers State and is regarded as one of the towns with the largest deposit of oil, as it boasts of over 150 oil wells.

Sources told New Telegraph that one of the soldiers that survived the attack alerted the 144 Battalion military camp at Asa where soldiers attached there subsequently invaded the community razing buildings in retaliation after the suspected bunkers must have escaped.

The source also said that aside from the alleged killing of the two soldiers, another issue that may have brought about the military invasion is the report that the rifles of the two soldiers were carted away by their killers.

The source said that the recent events in Owaza cannot be far from the fight the Rivers State Government has declared on illegal oil bunkers and pipeline vandals who are currently running to other safe places to continue their illicit business.

"What's happening in Owaza could be linked to bunkering. This is not the first time this is happening. Soldiers in Owaza can attest to the fact that they live in peace with our people. Our people can never hurt those soldiers."

"They're like our brothers because their presence is for our good as well. Nobody will be bold to come out but I can tell you that this issue is not far from illegal bunkering. They may not be expecting to meet soldiers there."

According to another source from Owaza, "After burning houses,

es, the soldiers have taken over Owaza and all the roads leading to her neighbouring towns of Obuzor, Umudobia to Obehie, Uzoaku, Okohia to Owaza.

"We heard it had to do with the oil bunkering. The ban on oil bunkering in Rivers State has affected the oil thieves; they are not comfortable with the soldiers at the Owaza - Obibor road."

Contacted, Public Relations Officer, 14 Brigade, Ohafia, said he was yet to be briefed on the incident. However, a military official in the state said an investigation has commenced into the incident.

Meanwhile, Abia State Governor, Dr Okezie Ikpeazu has called for calm from all the parties involved in the crisis urging them to give peace a chance and allow the state government an opportunity to find a solution to the matter.



Nigerian soldiers

## Police arrest 2 as student, mother hire thugs to beat