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## Nigeria: As Niger Delta Crisis Escalates, 35 Killed in JTF, Militants Clashes in 3 States

**This Day (Lagos)**  
**31 August 2008**

Posted to the web 31 August 2008

### Lagos

Thirty-five people were killed yesterday in violent clashes between security personnel policing the Niger Delta and militants. The deadly exchanges took place in Bayelsa, Delta and River States.

The Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) said in an e-mail message it sent to Reuters news agency that it had launched a series of reprisal attacks against the men of the Nigerian Army. The group claimed 29 soldiers and six of its own members were killed in the fighting.

MEND also said the close combat involving fast attack boats, rocket-propelled grenades and anti-tank missiles had taken place at three separate locations in the oil-producing region, a network of mangrove creeks.

When THISDAY called the Spokesman of JTF in Rivers State, Lt. Col. Sagir Musa to confirm the report at about 9.59pm, he said he was at a function and was not hearing us due to the noisy background which was noticeable.

We thereafter sent text to him but did not receive any reply as at press time. Musa had in the past responded promptly to inquiries.

A statement signed by Gbomo Jomo on behalf of MEND claimed that the militants attacked the JTF in Rivers, Bayelsa and Delta States simultaneously and recorded high casualty rate on the part of the soldiers while six of its own men died in an operation that was code-named "Operation Hunter Hunted".

Jomo in the statement gave the locations of the attack which he said journalists should visit as Odiamas creek in Bayelsa, Opia River in Delta and the confluence of Bonny and Andoni River in Rivers State.

Jomo claimed that the militants used advanced Soviet weapons combined with General Purpose Machine guns, rocket propelled grenades and other assorted weapons for the assault where they admitted they lost some of their combatants.

"In three separate co-ordinated attacks in Bayelsa, Delta and Rivers States which began about 19:30 Hrs on Saturday, August 30, 2008, fighters from the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) carried out reprisals on the military Joint Task Force (JTF) responsible for the killings of men, women and children from their so-called "warning shots" in the inland waterways to punitive expeditions on oil bearing communities.

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"Operation Hunter Hunted involved the use of several fast attack speedboats, general purpose machine guns, rocket propelled grenades and the deadly Soviet made anti-tank missiles at close range combat.

"The precise locations of the battles are Odiama creek in Bayelsa, Opia River in Delta, and the confluence of Bonny and Andoni River in Rivers state.

"Journalists should visit the locations mentioned above as soon as possible to witness the wreck of gunboats which were still burning when we left, to forestall any denial by the military.

"From our count, the predominantly ethnic northern JTF lost a total of 29 soldiers in the combined assault. We cannot account for those that jumped into the water in panic and drowned. We lost six of our gallant fighters", Jomo claimed.

"In three separate co-ordinated attacks in the states of Bayelsa, Delta and Rivers which began at about 19:30 on Saturday (yesterday), fighters from MEND carried out reprisals on the military Joint Task Force," MEND said in an e-mailed statement.

Meanwhile as the war against illegal oil activities in the Niger-Delta intensifies, the Joint Task Force (JTF) yesterday arrested 20 barges and uncovered an illegal outlet in Warri, Delta State, where petroleum products from suspected illegal local refineries were being sold.

The JTF said in an operation code-named "Operation Restore Hope", its men arrested barges, which were being used for bunkering. The barges, it said were picked up in the creeks in Burutu Local Government Area of the state.

The JTF media co-ordinator, Lt-Col Rabe Abubakar, who confirmed the two incidents to THISDAY in Warri, estimated the capacity of the seized vessels at about 9, 900, 000 litres of crude oil.

This calculation is based on the fact that each vessel has the capacity for 15 trucks with each holding 33,000-litres of the commodity.

Nine persons had also been arrested in connection with the two incidents, Abubakar said. He said that 29 drums of oil and a Mercedes-Benz truck were seized from six suspects during the weekend raid at the illegal depot at Ngwu Market, Warri, while three suspects were arrested in connection with the 20 barges.

The JTF Commander, Brig-Gen Naven Wuyep Rimtip, described the weekend operations, particularly the arrest of the 20 barges as constituting "one of the biggest successes recorded in the intensifying fight against illicit activities in the Niger-Delta."

The vessels were at the verge of pulling out into the high seas off the coast of Delta and Bayelsa states when they were intercepted and subsequently overpowered, the spokesman added.

The suspects were still being detained pending the conclusion of preliminary investigations into the incidents; before those arrested would be handed over to appropriate security authorities for further investigation and possible prosecution, Abubakar told THISDAY.

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*From Ahamefula Ogbu in Port Harcourt,  
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Author: gishola

With the performance of the present administration in the country, one is not surprised that the leaders are either incapable, unfortunately, of fathoming where the present situation will land the country or they are intent on using their present position to create more mega projects from which they can corruptly make millions of dollars individually whilst also rubbing Peter to pay Paul. The problem in the country now is that a lot of people are disillusioned about the TRIBALISM that has

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