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**Nigeria: Pipeline Explosion Claims Lives in Arepo**

Chika Amanze-Nwachuku

16 December 2009

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Lagos — Another tragic fire erupted Monday night from a vandalised Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) pipeline at Arepo in Ogun State, leaving an unconfirmed number of persons dead. Scores of persons were said to have sustained varying degree of burns in the inferno, which raged until yesterday morning.

It is feared that the incident may worsen the current fuel crisis in the country as the damaged pipeline transports products to Mosimi depot, which services parts of the South-West and the North.

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Both the spokesman of the NNPC, Dr. Levi Ajuonuma and the Public Affairs Manager of the Pipelines Products and Marketing Company (PPMC), a subsidiary of the NNPC, Mr. Ralph Ugwu confirmed the incident and blamed it on the handiwork of vandals.

The duo also confirmed that the fire was put out yesterday morning, while engineers have commenced work on the vandalised portion of the

pipeline.

THISDAY investigations however revealed that vandals have been siphoning petrol from the burst pipeline, until Monday night when the fire erupted. Sources said some of the vandals lost their lives in the inferno, which caught them unawares.

Vandalism of petroleum pipelines has remained the greatest threat to effective and efficient supply and distribution of petroleum products in Nigeria. The NNPC, it was learnt, suffered 971 cases of pipeline vandalism in 2004, 2,258 in 2005 and 2,912 cases in 2006 and a substantial number in 2007.

A recent report by the Pipelines and Product Marketing Company (PPMC) revealed that Nigeria recorded a revenue of about N150 billion in eight years owing to vandalism of petroleum pipelines.

In March, 2008, fire erupted from a vandalised portion of NNPC pipeline in the same Arepo, killing the Deputy Area Manager in charge of Maintenance at the Mosimi Depot. Three other senior members of staff of the corporation were severely burnt. The officials had gone to inspect the vandalised pipeline when tragedy struck.

In June this year, the corporation's oil pipeline in Ilado, a Lagos suburb exploded at the leaving scores of persons injured.

Eleven fuel boats believed to have belonged to some vandals who had gone to scoop fuel from the vandalised pipeline were razed.

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The fire, which erupted at about 8.15 PM that fateful day damaged the pipeline that transports refined products from the corporation's Atlas Cove depot to Mosimi depot in Ogun State, from where products are distributed to users in parts of Ogun, Ondo and the North.

While some sources blame the rising cases of pipeline fires on aging pipelines, which they say get ruptured due to their inability to cope with pumping pressure, others attribute the cause to vandalism.

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However observers believe that some of these tragedies could have been averted if the NNPC leaved up to their responsibilities by promptly addressing the problems when alerted.

On December 26, 2006, hundreds of persons were killed when a vandalised pipeline in Awori area of Abule Egba, a Lagos suburb exploded. Residents of the area had alleged that NNPC officials had been contacted long before the day of the incident but they failed to respond.

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