

Military Recovers Massive Arms in N'Delta, Arrests 1,846 Suspects

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- **Seizes 105 tankers conveying stolen crude**

Emmanuel Addeh in Yenagoa

The Joint Task Force (JTF), Operation Delta Safe, thursday in Yenagoa, Bayelsa State, disclosed that it had in the last 15 months recovered massive high-calibre weapons used by militants and suspected oil thieves in the Niger Delta.

Listing its successes in the fight against criminalities in the region, the JTF, a coalition of all security agencies in

the country, noted that the killing of four deadly militants across the Niger Delta states was also a breakthrough in its effort to rid the region of 'hostile elements'.

In a joint press conference by the Acting Director of Defence Information, Abuja, Brig.-Gen John Agim and the Deputy Commander of the JTF, Brig.-Gen Kevin Aligbe, the Force also declared that it recovered 1,389 different types of arms and 20,352 items of munitions from criminals.

"From January 1, 2017, till date, the Force has seized and impounded 24 vessels, 191 barges, 234 outboard engines and 476 other types of passenger boats.

"Additionally, the Force has seized 105 tanker trucks, 228 other vehicles and 610 pumping machines as well as 76 generator sets and 5,842 other items being used in facilitating illegalities in the joint operations areas," Agim said.

According to the defence spokesman, to make life uncomfortable for the militants and illegal oil refiners, the military also embarked on the destruction of their safe havens and the items used in perpetrating illegalities.

"The Force has in this process destroyed 1,437 illegal refineries, 795 wooden cargo boats (also known as Cotonou boats), 3,872 metal surface tanks and 1,019 plastic tanks. Also, 13,129 drums and 13,343 Jerry cans have been destroyed," he said.

He added that the use of 'swamp buggy' in the JTF's anti-illegal refining operations had significantly degraded the capacity of illegal refinery operators to revamp destroyed illegal refineries.

Agim declared that since activation, a total of 1,846 persons involved in diverse acts of criminality had been arrested in the JOA, adding that a large percentage of the suspects had been transferred to prosecuting agencies accordingly.

The operation which covers the entire Bayelsa, Delta and Rivers States, as well as the southern parts of Abia, Akwa Ibom, Cross River, Imo and Ondo States, the military said, also saw the clearing of areas of identified militant camps whose activities had threatened national security.

Recalling the killing of some top militants in the region, the JTF noted that many of the operations led to the restoration of fullscale oil production in the Niger Delta.

"Several militants have been neutralized and camps destroyed in the process. Furthermore, a high profile militant called Ossy Ibori was neutralised at Ajakpa, Ese-Odo LGA of Ondo State. One Augustine Gbangbanran, who operated along the Sapele/Warri North axis of Delta State, died of gunshot wounds he sustained in an encounter with troops.

"Operations which were initiated in 2017, eventually led to the neutralisation of another notorious militant called Oyawerikumor Peregbakumor (a.k.a. Kariowei) in early 2018.

"Subject had terrorised communities along the Bomadi/Burutu axis of Delta state, and staged high profile kidnappings including that of four (4) British expatriates in 2017 in which one missionary died.

"In Southern Cross Rivers and Akwa Ibom, Operation Delta Safe carried out an extensive clearance operation from March 24 to April 1, 2018. Prior to the operation,

the security situation had significantly deteriorated following violent cult and militants activities.

“Two local government areas of Akwa Ibom States namely Etim Ekpo and Ukanafun were cleared of miscreants who had negatively impacted socio-economic life. The operation was a huge success owing to synergy amongst the security agencies in Akwa Ibom State with the OPDS,” Agim said.

He noted that on April 11, 2018, Operation Delta Safe successfully conducted a covert operation with Special Forces where a high profile militant leader of the Bakassi Strike Force, alias G1, had continued to pose a transnational threat in Cameroun and the coastal territory of Bakassi, Ikang and environs in Nigeria.

“Concertedly, our troops dislodged the militant group’s camp at a creek along Efut Esighi in Cross River States where several arms and ammunition were recovered and some of the militants neutralized,” he added.

Brig.-Gen Aligbe, who also heads the land component of the JTF and is Commander 16 brigade, Yenagoa, on his part, said feedback from the prosecuting agencies showed that 66 cases were prosecuted , 48 were successful , two cases were lost, while others were ongoing.