

Gunmen open fire on oil workers, kill one

By Jimitota Onoyume
with agency reports

PORT HARCOURT —
YET to be identified gun-
men in Rivers State, yesterday,
opened fire on two Lebanese
workers, killing one.

The duo were driving in their company's (a construction firm) car to inspect a project at Isiokpo when they unexpectedly came under attack.

The one died on the spot while the other and the driver, a Nigerian were severally injured.

They were subsequently rushed to an undisclosed hospital.

Also yesterday two Italian technicians were yesterday abducted during a shootout near Port Harcourt according to Italy's Deputy Foreign Minister, Franco Daureli.

Lucio Moro and Luciano Passarin, who work for the construction firm Impregilo, were kidnapped after the clash some 40 kilometers from Port Harcourt Danieli said.

Spokesperson for Rivers state police confirmed the incident.

"The Italians were kidnapped this morning in Ogoniland. We still don't have the details," Ireju Barasua said.

The Anglo-Dutch oil giant Shell was forced by community unrest to quit Ogoniland in 1993. The attacks on Friday came a day after the Movement for the (MEND) threatened to

retaliate against Italian firm Agip and Bayelsa state government over the release of a Lebanese oil worker which it claimed escaped from its custody.

An industry source said the Lebanese nationals who came under fire were employees of AUC, a construction firm in Port Harcourt.

He said the men were attacked on Isiokpe road in Ikwere Local Government Area, adding that the wounded Lebanese was in the hospital for treatment.

Lebanese embassy officials were not immediately available to comment on the incident.

Lebanese diplomatic sources in Abuja announced Wednesday that Imad Saliba, who was abducted more than two months ago, had been freed and was "safe and well" after undergoing a medical check-up.

But the Movement for the Emancipation of Niger Delta (MEND), who kidnapped Saliba and three Italian colleagues on December 7, said he escaped. "It was an escape hatched by (oil firm) Agip and the Bayelsa State government."

"Agip and the Bayelsa State government will pay a hefty price for this slight," the armed group threatened in an email.

Two of the Italians abducted with Saliba are still being held by MEND. The third was freed on January 18 because of health problems.