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By Emma Amaize

Posted to the Web: Monday, September 24, 2007

WARRI — A three-year-old boy, identified as Oghenevwegba Okpaku, was reportedly burnt to death and no fewer than five others critically injured in fresh kerosene explosions at Ozoro, Oviri-Olomu, Ughevughe and Effurun-Otor communities in Delta state.

A squad of security operatives, including soldiers and policemen stormed the Okpare creek to arrest the bunkerers, alleged to be mixing stolen condensate with kerosene somewhere in the creeks but the bunkerers, who, apparently got prior information, fled before the arrival of the security operatives.

It was gathered, weekend, that the late Oghenevwegba and his two sisters were affected by the explosion, which occurred as one of them was pouring kerosene into a lamp that was already on.

The father of the children, Mr. Paul Okpaku and neighbours rescued two of the kids from the fire not knowing that Oghenevwegba was trapped inside, and by the time they went for him, he had suffered up to 96 per cent burns.

The victims were later rushed to the Central Hospital, Ughelli for treatment but while two of the children were responding to treatment, the three-year-old Oghenevwegba gave up the ghost.

Irate residents in the area mounted a search for the kerosene hawker who was apprehended and handed over to the police at Otu-Jeremi. It was learnt that the president-general of the Oviri-Olomu community, Chief Stephen Obugara had met with other leaders of the community to find ways of stemming the adulterated kerosene flow to the community.

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Besides the Okpaku children who were burnt at Oviri-Olomu, an eight-year-old Miss Ejiro Ekure was torched when the kerosene bought by her mother from a hawker at Ughevughe community exploded after their stove was lit.

At Okparabe village in Effurun-Otor, 50-year-old Mrs Alice Police was equally burnt while a 21-year-old student of the Delta State Polytechnic, Ozoro in Delta state, whose identity was given as Leleji Edna was from her stomach down when the kerosene she bought from a hawker exploded, as she struck a match after pouring it into her lantern.

Meanwhile, Mrs. Abiola Idris, whose two children, Mustapha and Hikimot Idris were burnt in the kerosene explosion at Kwale has appealed to the state government and kind-hearted Nigerians and organizations to come to the aid of her family in raising the money to pay the medical bills for the treatment of the children at the private hospital they were rushed to.

The mother of six lamented that her husband was jobless and the family could not afford the medical bill, which the medical officer in-charge of the clinic, Dr. Okenwa Abonyi said was over N200,000.

Vanguard learnt that Mustapha who was severely burnt may require a surgical operation. The state government had, in the wake of the Warri kerosene explosions, directed victims in the state to government hospitals for free treatment. Governor Emmanuel Uduaghan ordered the release of N50,000 to each of the victims to attend to their personal needs.

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