

Pirates kill three trawler operators

LAGOS — THE Nigerian Trawler Owners Association (NITOA) has lost three crew members, following persistent attacks on vessels belonging to members of the association, the Executive Secretary, Dr Michael Bissong, has announced.

Bissong told reporters yesterday in Lagos that pirates had attacked NITOA's interests about 16 times in the past two weeks, killing three and injuring many others.

He said the latest attack involved about 50 pirates, whom he said, attacked the vessel, MFV Silver Mermaid, last week, leaving a trail of blood and tears.

According to him, the pirates operating with sophisticated weapons in a speed boat attacked furiously, maiming and disposing the vessel of its catches, after which they vandalized the vessel.

"The incessant loss of lives in the third quarter of this year is increasing. The attacks in the last two months have resulted in death of crew members and other serious injuries," he said.

Bissong said that the piracy

which had been off-again on-again over the years had suddenly assumed what he described as a ferocious dimension in recent times.

He lamented that the situation had worsened to the point that the pirates now operated with gun boats and artillery in their attacks on seafarers.

"These attacks are now beyond the realm of reason. We have been attacked 16 times in the month of October alone. The attack is from Calabar to Lekki.

Our fishing areas are no longer accessible to our vessels," he said.

The NITOA Executive Secretary said that the federal government had been briefed on the development, resulting in the setting up of the presidential committee on piracy, which he said, had failed to meet the expectations of NITOA.

According to him, between 2005 and 2007 over 120 fishing vessels have been attacked at various times, resulting in the death of over 40 persons with loss of fishing assets worth over one billion naira.