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Nigeria: Gunmen Kill Four Military Personnel, Shell Worker in Bayelsa

Vanguard (Lagos)**8 November 2008**

Posted to the web 10 November 2008

The relative peace in the coastal enclave of Bayelsa State was Thursday night shattered as five persons among them four military personnel and a staff of the Shell Petroleum Development Company (SPDC) were killed by some armed gunmen in the Nembe waterways.

The tragic incident came on the heel of Wednesday attack on the JTF location at Clough Creek in Ekeremor local government area of Bayelsa State by suspected militants which led to the death of a civilian prompting the military outfit through its media campaign centre to raise alarm of a deliberate act by those it identified as militants threatening the peace existing in the state.

Although the cause of the tragic killing could not be ascertained but informed sources told Saturday Vanguard that it might not be unconnected with the intra communal crisis that rocked the coastal settlement over the election into the youth body of Nembe Bassambiri.

The deceased naval personnel and the SPDC staff Saturday Vanguard learnt were travelling and were caught unaware along the Nembe waterways by the rampaging armed youths and were under siege.

It was further learnt that the SPDC staff, identified as Dennis Kupkup, the only civilian on the boat allegedly hike a ride with the naval patrol boat enroute the state capital but got caught in the gun battle.

While the corpse of the naval personnel and the SPDC staff were reported to have been deposited at the General Hospital in the council area, the only surviving officer is receiving treatment at the Federal Medical Centre, Yenagoa the Bayelsa State capital.

Confirming the incident to newsmen in Yenagoa, the Chairman of the Nembe-Bassambiri Council of Chiefs, Chief Alfred Tamuno yesterday disclosed that the preliminary investigation by the elders and chiefs of the community showed that youths involved in the killing were those identified in the September aborted invasion of the community over the youth executive election crisis in the area.

Chief Tamuno, who expressed regret over the incident, said the youths were actually on the trail of one Chief Igoli who was reported to have visited the community to campaign for an aspirant in the forthcoming local government election in the state.

According to him, "the youths were said to have mobilized and stormed

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the community but their target had left the community. On their way back, there was shooting and it was on the naval patrol boat."

He said the naval personnel were immediately moved to the General Hospital in Nembe but that one died on the spot and others, including the civilian staff of the SPDC later died. "One of the naval officer is at the Federal Medical Centre receiving treatment and the condition is improving," he said.

While the community has promised to assist in arresting the youths involved in the killing of the naval men, the scheduled Saturday meeting of the Nembe-Bassambiri Council of Chiefs at the Nembe Town it was learnt might still hold as the incident could form top of the agenda.

However attempt to gain entrance into the emergency ward where the injured naval officer was receiving treatment was rebuffed by health personnel.

Contacted on the incident, the State Deputy Commissioner of Police (DCP), Abayomi Akerele denied any connection between the incident and the forthcoming election but said they are on red alert to investigate and bring those involved to book.

Also reacting to the development, the Chairman of the Peace and Conflict Resolution Committee, Chief James Jephath said his office had received the news of the incident and have been in consultation with the security agencies and the community.

"The community has promised to co-operate with the state government and security agencies to fish out those responsible for the act," he said.

Meanwhile, the Joint Task Force has raised an alarm over attempts by some armed groups to derail the existing peace in the Niger Delta region with particular reference to the November 5th attacks on military formation in the Bayelsa State.

In an on-line statement issued yesterday in Yenagoa, the coordinator of the Joint Media Campaign Centre in Warri, Lt. Col. Rabe Abubakar said, "

"In continuation of the militants' effort to derail the peace process and push the military to an unwarranted confrontation, militants, in about 20 speed boats, attacked JTF location at Clough Creek in Ekeremor local government area of Bayelsa State, on 5 November, 2008.

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"There was no own casualty but the attackers killed a civilian while escaping from our troops superior fire power. This unprovoked attack is uncalled for and the Commander JTF has condemned this act of aggression against own troops".

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