

METRO

3 oil workers arraigned for alleged murder, illegal bunkering in Ondo

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By Dayo Johnson

Three workers of Shebah Exploration and Production Company Ltd, in Ilaje council area of Ondo State, have been arraigned in court for murder, arson, malicious damage and destruction of property through illegal bunkering activities.

The suspects, Anthony Nwuba, Orofin Pius Yomi and Patrick Aganyebi, were charged by the police over the murder of nine persons by allegedly setting them ablaze through illegal bunkering activities in the vessel and thereby commit an offence contrary to section 316 (9) of the criminal code.

They were charged with causing an explosion that set ablaze Sheba Company vessel valued at N41.6 billion through illegal bunkering activities contrary to section 443 (b) of the state criminal code.

However, counsel to the suspects, Dr Benson Enikuomelin, who described the charges as trump-up, said: “It was callous on the part of the Police to charge workers of the company for murder when indeed they escaped death by the whiskers when the vessel they were working with exploded on the sea.

“It would be recalled that explosion occurred at the Trinity Spirit floating production, storage, and offloading (FPSO) vessel, which belongs to Shebah Exploration and Production Company Ltd (SEPCOL), a producer from OML 108 covering 750 square km (290 square miles) off the waters of the Niger Delta in Ondo State.

“Nine persons were said to have died in the explosion but not all the bodies were recovered while 60,000 barrels of oil spilt from the vessel were destroyed.

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However, the Police prosecutor, Adeoye Adesegun, told the court that the offences were against Sections 324, 319 (9) and 443 (b) of the Criminal Code Cap 37 Vol.1 Laws of Ondo State of Nigeria, 2006.

In his motion, Adesegun asked the court to remand the suspects in prison custody pending legal advice from the Department of Public Prosecutions (DPP) in the state Ministry of Justice.

But Enikuomelin in a counter-affidavit said the charges brought against the defendants were smoke-screen to hide the truth.

He added that the firm was owing the staff being prosecuted for murder more than two years' salary arrears.

According to him, it was some fishermen that helped the defendants who were working on the vessel on the night of the inferno escape being killed in the incident.

He, therefore, wondered why the charge of murder, arson, and malicious damage would be brought against those who were supposed to be in the hospital recuperating.

However, Presiding Magistrate, Olanipekun Mayumi, granted the suspects bail in the sum of N2 million each and a surety in like sum.

Mayumi ordered the case file sent to the Department of Public Prosecution for legal advice and adjourned the matter to July 13, 2022, for mention.