

Okuama Killings: Army recovers stolen weapons



Okuama

•Residents of Delta community cry out over alleged torture by soldiers
•One dead; victim's eardrum impaired; another can't walk—Evuarherhe, president-general- Olota community
By Emma Amaize, Regional Editor, South-South, Akpokona Omafuaire and Ochuko Akuopha

ASABA – THE Chief of Civil-Military Affairs, Nigerian Army, Major General Nosakhare Ugbo, said yesterday the Army has recovered some of the arms and ammunition snatched from soldiers killed on March 14 at [Okuama community](#) in Ughelli South Local Government Area, Delta State.

This came as Olota community in the state raised the alarm that a resident, Joseph Willie, who the soldiers that raided the community for pilfered arms and ammunition, and killers of their colleagues, tortured, slumped, and died after the military brutality on them.

This is even as the eardrum of one brutalized victim, Reuben Awanriarere, has been impaired, while another villager, Okwagbe Ebiré, cannot walk after the severe beating he received.

Speaking at the Nigerian Army Civil-Military Cooperation Media Chat, first quarter, 2024 at Asaba, capital of Delta State, Ugbo said the search was still ongoing for those involved in the killing of the 17 military personnel.

His words: “Arrests will be continually made; this is an issue under investigation, but I am telling you that our equipment, our arms and ammunition, we are still searching for them. We have got some, we have not got others, the search is continuing.”

On the media restriction to Okuama community, he said: “It is a crime scene. Even in civil crimes, you will tape it everywhere. That is a crime scene, investigation has not been concluded, so, I don't think it will be appropriate for anybody to go there and interfere with the investigation.”

Regarding the safety of the [detained Ovie of Ewu Kingdom, HRM Clement Ikolo](#), the military officer said: “The traditional ruler, I believe, is safe. They are still questioning him; he is still under investigation.

“Every other issue around Okuama is still under investigation and I assure you that at the end of the investigation, whatever will unfold will be brought to the fore. Everyone will be informed on the outcome of the investigation.

“As I told you, the investigation is on. Probably tomorrow (today), they (investigators) may see other names. As the investigation unfolds, more facts will emerge, and new people might be called for questioning.

“There is a Joint Task Force, Operation Delta Safe, in the South-South region of the country and they have a role to maintain security.

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“For those saying it is a police thing, the commander is just a military man, but there are other components. There is a police component commander; there are people from the Department of State Services, DSS, and every security agency in

the country, so it is a robust structure.”

Why Army is focussed on Okuama

On why the Army seems to be focusing more on Okuama than other areas where **soldiers** have been previously attacked, Ugbo explained: “In other theatres, soldiers were killed in action by enemies or adversaries, not inside a community. “Probably, I am sure you will say Boko Haram areas. Those places are inside the Sambisa forest and other locations. We know that these are terrorists, and we go after them, so it is an act of warfare.

“In recent history where our soldiers were killed, they were killed within the country in the course of carrying out their duties by enemies of the state, and in doing that, we also carry out military action to ensure that those enemies pay the price but, of course, this is a community that we are talking about.”

Commenting on the search on the country home residence of Niger Delta leader, Chief Edwin Clark, Ugbo said: “In the first instance, when I spoke the first time, I said it is an ongoing investigation. If, during the investigation, they find that I have something, I am sure they will come and ask me questions or they will search me. If during the search, they find nothing, they will let me go.

Okuama remains a crime scene

“Some of these investigations take time. Nobody will be able to give you a complete picture of what has happened or what went wrong until such a time that there is a comprehensive investigation. I appeal for patience.”

On lack of access to Okuama, he said: “I told you it is a crime scene, and as a crime scene, it is being investigated, so, please let us be patient.

“I do not think and I am not sure, nobody has told me that the people are not eating or that they are displaced. If they are displaced, it means they are somewhere else.

“Anything about Okuama community is still under investigation. There is an investigation and the community is helping the investigators to lead to the solution of recovering our arms, and also helping us to identify and **arrest all of the perpetrators** of the dastardly act, so, let us be patient. With time, everything will come out.”

One dead, another's eardrum damaged

Meanwhile, at Olota, another community in Delta State, where the people are grieving, the president general, Mr. Prosper Evuarherhe, who spoke to Vanguard, said: “I am calling on the authorities to wade into this matter, as we pray for peace to reign in our communities.

“This is one of the four victims of soldiers’ brutality. His name is Reuben Awanriarere. He was among four persons **taken hostage by military men** on March 15, while returning home from travel.

“Because of the inhuman treatment meted out on him by the soldiers, he cannot even speak; otherwise, I would have asked him questions. They damaged his eardrums, he cannot even hear now.

“To get him to the hospital in Ughelli now is critical. The other victim, Okwagbe Ebirie, cannot walk. They tied them up like crocodiles, but these people (soldiers) have taken him away.

“Joseph Willie died from torture; his corpse is in the mortuary at Bomadi. We call on the authorities, Urhobo Progress Union, UPU, and the state government to come to our aid.

“They took them away when their boat had a problem while returning to Olota. The government should ensure that the soldiers do not continue to terrorize Olota again.

“Olota is not at war with any community. Olota is over 50km from Okuama where the incident happened ”

