

Nigeria: MEND rebels destroy Chevron oil pipelines

by Helen Vesperini via gan - AFP *Monday, May 25 2009, 11:42am*

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Attacking U.S. Oil Interests -- WAY TO GO!

LAGOS (AFP) — Nigeria's main rebel group on Monday destroyed several major oil pipelines in the south in response to a military offensive, prompting a cut in production announced at 100,000 barrels a day



MEND Rebels

The Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) said it had put "out of operation" a major Chevron oil storage facility by destroying the pipelines and flow stations that feed it.

"Fighters from MEND destroyed major trunk lines," the group said in a statement emailed to media.

US oil giant Chevron confirmed an attack on one of its pipelines in the Abiteye area of Delta State.

"To protect the environment, the incident has led to the shut in of approximately 100,000 BOPD (barrels of oil per day) production from its (Chevron) swamp operations in Delta State," it said.

MEND has staged scores of attacks on international oil facilities in southern Nigeria as part of a campaign to get what it calls a fairer distribution of regional oil wealth to local people.

Nigeria's oil production has been cut by more than a quarter because of the militant campaign over the past three years.

The Joint Task Force (JTF), the army-police unit deployed in the region, confirmed the blowing up of the pipeline at Abiteye, calling it "an act of sabotage which should not be condoned."

A statement from spokesman Rabe Abubakar said "all those involved in this latest act must be hunted ... down."

MEND -- which claims its latest attacks affected flow stations at Alero Creek, Otunana, Makaraba and Dibi, as well as Abiteye -- said the attacks were in response to a government offensive against it over the past 10 days in Delta State.

MEND said it was "applying the same measure of treatment the impoverished oil bearing communities suffered in the hands of government troops by ensuring huge collateral damage."

Local media have quoted residents fleeing Gbaramatu Kingdom, the main target area of the military operations, as accusing armed forces of indiscriminate bombing of civilians and burning of homes.

The JTF says it is only conducting a "cordon and search" operation and focusing only "on the areas where there are militants and their hideouts where hostages were being kept."

The JTF says it has released groups of Filipino, Ukranian and Nigerian hostages seized in raids on vessels. Most recently it says it rescued three Filipino seamen on Saturday and a further three on Sunday.

MEND said the three who regained their freedom Sunday were released, not rescued.

MEND and the JTF blame each other for igniting new violence. MEND accuses the armed forces of having launched an unprovoked attack on the camp of an allied armed group while the JTF says militants fired on one of its patrols.

Gbaramatu Kingdom is accessible only by boat and residents of Warri, the nearest major town, say the army has stopped boat traffic in the area.

Hostage taking is common in the Niger Delta, with several hundred people, mostly but not all linked to the oil industry, kidnapped there in the past three years.

The line between militant activity and kidnappings for ransom by criminal gangs with no political agenda is often blurred.

MEND also renewed its threat of bringing Nigeria's oil industry to a standstill.

"The Joint Task Force has been chasing shadows for the past two weeks and has not achieved any military success. We will continue our cat and mouse tactics with them until oil export ceases completely," the group said.

Analysts say armed groups such as MEND have a geographical advantage over the army in the creeks of the Niger Delta as they know the terrain better.

International oil prices have spiked, partly because of the MEND attacks and the military offensive in Nigeria's main oil producing region.

Unrest in the Niger Delta region has reduced Nigeria's daily output to 1.76 million barrels compared with 2.6 million barrels in January 2006.

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