

# Nigeria

<b>Response to Information Request Number:</b>	NGA00002.ZSF
<b>Date:</b>	14 January 2000
<b>Subject:</b>	Nigeria: Information on the "Egbesu Boys of Africa" and the "Niger Delta Volunteer Force"
<b>From:</b>	INS Resource Information Center, Washington, D.C.
<b>Keywords:</b>	Nigeria / Civil disobedience / Community development / Corporate responsibility / Cultural identity / Demonstrations / Economic and social rights / Environmental degradation / Ethnic minorities / Grassroots organizations / Freedom of conscience / Indigenous peoples / Military intervention / Military occupation / Political opposition / Protection of human rights / Public order / Political violence / Protests / Right to an adequate standard of living / Right to control natural resources / Right to a healthy environment / Right to resist oppression / Riots / Rural poverty / Quality of life / Security forces / Social unrest / Territorial integrity / Use of force / Youth organizations

## Query:

Please provide information on the "Egbesu Boys of Africa" and the "Niger Delta Volunteer Force" and whether these groups are implicated in any human rights abuses.

Is membership in either group limited to a particular ethnic group?

Could an Ogoni belong to either or both groups?

## Response:

From mid-1998, various tribal groups in the oil-rich Niger delta have been agitating for a more equitable distribution of wealth (Andersson 6 Nov. 1998; Lamb 21 Feb. 1999; Vidal 29 Sept. 1999). Most of the recent trouble involves the Ijaw, with eleven million the largest group in the region.

Ijaw youth, who figure prominently in violence associated with these protests, have been drawn to a revival of the ancient cult of Egbesu, which they believe gives them supernatural powers protecting against gunshots or other harm. (Andersson 6 Nov. 1999) An offshoot of this movement, the "Egbesu Boys of Africa," has warned that unless its demands are met it will declare war against the government (FBIS 2 Aug. 1999). In similar fashion the "Niger Delta Volunteer Force," described by the BBC as one of the leading Ijaw groups, has indicated it is prepared to negotiate with the government but demands a significant increase in oil revenues and jobs (Phillips 2 Jan. 1999). Ijaw youth have been involved in numerous fatal clashes with soldiers and police and, according to a well regarded Nigeria specialist, are thought to be involved in the lucrative business of kidnapping foreign oil workers for ransom (Manby 13 Jan. 2000). The government is taking this unrest seriously, on the one hand sealing off large parts of the delta in the army's "biggest deployment since the end of military rule" last May and, on the other, rushing to allocate \$600 million for development (BBC 24 Nov. 1999).

None of the Ijaw youth groups, however, is well organized, nor is there any kind of central command (Manby 13 Jan. 2000). Information on other Egbesu-related groups was unavailable to the RIC among the sources consulted. A Washington-based human rights worker who visited Nigeria last September believes that frequently Ijaw groups organized themselves simply for the promotion of their political rights and that they would completely disagree with their portrayal in the popular press as 'militants' (Wilson 13 Jan. 2000).

Three specialists separately noted that it seems unusual that an ethnic Ogoni would belong to Ijaw groups such as the Egbesu Boys or the Niger Delta Volunteer Force. As Manby—the most knowledgeable of the three and the only one specifically familiar with the Egbesu Boys—put it, "this does not compute." In her view such an association likely was a "wholly fabricated story."

This response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the RIC within time constraints. This response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim to refugee status or asylum.

#### References:

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