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27 October 2009

### NGA103271.E

Nigeria: Whether the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) sponsors cultist activities on university campuses and supplies student cults with weapons

Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Ottawa

Information on a relationship between student cults and the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) was scarce among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate.

In 1 October 2009 correspondence with the Research Directorate, a University of Oxford doctoral student conducting research in Nigeria who has also worked as a West Africa analyst for international organizations, stated that he was unaware of MEND sponsoring student cultist activities on university campuses or supplying student cults with weapons (Doctoral Student 1 Oct. 2009). In 3 October 2009 correspondence, a lecturer at a University in Rivers State, Nigeria who has written extensively on conflict in the Niger Delta, also indicated that he was unaware of MEND sponsoring the activities of student cults on campus or supplying weapons to them (Lecturer 3 Oct. 2009).

However, sources report that student cults and Niger Delta insurgent groups like MEND are closely intertwined (*Pambazuka News* 2 July 2009; UN 28 Jan. 2008; Jamestown Foundation 6 July 2007). The Jamestown Foundation, a research institution based in Washington, DC, reports that Niger Delta militant groups recruit some of their fighters from existing cult organizations (Jamestown Foundation 6 July 2007). Additionally, student cults have reportedly extended their reach off campuses and are hiring out their "services" to insurgent groups (Lecturer 3 Oct. 2009; HRW Oct. 2007, 23-24; Jamestown Foundation 6 July 2007).

According to the Lecturer, "some MEND members belonged to campus cults in their student days" (Lecturer 3 Oct. 2009; *The Economist* 31 July 2008). He also stated that due to the practice of some MEND leaders of hiring armed gangs, student cultists might be involved in some of MEND's operations (Lecturer 3 Oct. 2009). Soboma George, leader of the off-campus cult the Outlaws, is also reportedly a commander in MEND (HRW Mar. 2008, 57; Jamestown Foundation 6 July 2007).

This Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim for refugee protection. Please find below the list of sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

## References

Doctoral Student, Institute of Social and Cultural Anthropology, University of Oxford. 1 October 2009. Correspondence.

*The Economist*. 31 July 2008. "Cults of Violence: How Student Fraternities Turned Into Powerful and Well-Armed Gangs." <[http://www.economist.com/world/middleeast-africa/PrinterFriendly.cfm?story\\_id=11849078](http://www.economist.com/world/middleeast-africa/PrinterFriendly.cfm?story_id=11849078)> [Accessed 6 Oct. 2009]

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Human Rights Watch (HRW). March 2008. *Politics as War: The Human Rights Impact and Causes of Post-Election Violence in Rivers State, Nigeria*. <<http://www.hrw.org/node/62303>> [Accessed 24 Sept. 2009]

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The Jamestown Foundation. 6 July 2007. Bestman Wellington. "Nigeria's Cults and Their Role in the Niger Delta Insurgency." *Terrorism Monitor*. Vol 5. Issue 13. <[http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no\\_cache=1&tx\\_ttnews\[tt\\_news\]=4288](http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no_cache=1&tx_ttnews[tt_news]=4288)> [Accessed 24 Sept. 2009]

*Pambazuka News*. 2 July 2009. Kola Ibrahim and Ayo Ademiluyi. "Nigeria: Mass-based Student Unionism Could Counterweight Cultism." Issue 440. <<http://www.pambazuka.org/en/category/features/57387/print>> [Accessed 5 Oct. 2009]

United Nations (UN). 28 January 2008. Integrated Regional Information Networks (IRIN). "Nigeria: Police Corruption Blamed for Wave of Arrests." <<http://www.irinnews.org/report.aspx?ReportID=76458>> [Accessed 5 Oct. 2009]

## Additional Sources Consulted

**Oral sources:** Attempts to contact two academics who have written on students cults in Nigeria and MEND were unsuccessful. A professor at the University of Bonn and a doctoral student at the Centre for Research on Inequality, Human Security and Ethnicity at the University of Oxford who have both published research on violent groups in Nigeria were unable to provide information on the relationship between MEND and student cults.

**Publications, including:** *Small Arms, Armed Violence and Insecurity in the Delta: The Niger Delta in Perspective*.

**Internet sources, including:** Amnesty International (AI), British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), European Country of Origin Information Network (ecoi.net), International Crisis Group, Office of the United Nations (UN) High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) Refworld, United Kingdom (UK) Border Agency, United States (US) Department of State.

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