

## COVER NEWS

Saturday, October 3, 2009 will go down in history as a great day in the Niger Delta struggle. This day Comrade Ateke Tom, leader of the Niger Delta Vigilante Movement NDVM, Mr. Farah Dagogo, and Chief George Government Ekpemu-kpolo (aka Tompolo) largely seen as the last pillars of resistance against the Federal Government in the Niger Delta struggle for self determination in company of over 5,000 militants surrendered large quantities of arms, ammunition and military paraphernalia.

The venue of the carnival-like event was the Tourist Beach, Port Harcourt the Rivers State Capital. Before the colorful event, a team comprising reporters and their supporters led by Tom's lawyer, Hon. Uche Onyeaguocha, a former member of the House of Representatives and Governorship candidate of the Action Congress (AC) in Imo State during the April 14, 2007 election moved to Tom's Dutch Island camp, using speed boats.

Dutch Island's expansive camp in a thick forest inside the Creeks of Rivers State off Okrika Local Government Area and inaccessible to military men has the militant leader's mansion, a helipad and no fewer than eight other houses for his boys.

The team made up of officers and men of the Joint Military Task Force (JTF) on the Niger Delta led by Maj-Gen Sarkin Bello later escorted the train to the Tourist Beach venue through the marine base jetty.

Ateke Tom and his teeming supporters later turned the event to a street carnival as they sang his praises drumming, dancing and shooting upwards intermittently to show support for their "godfather" and entertain the visitors as they displayed the arms and ammunition.

It was very difficult to differentiate between Tom's "boys" and Soldiers at the event as they all appeared in full military camouflage. Weapons Surrendered by the militant leaders comprise 28 stickler grenades, 36 charged rocket propelled grenades (RPG), 23 RPG bombs, one anti-aircraft gun, one brawny machine gun, gas masks, many ammunition belts as well as thousands of ammunition and magazines.

The Rivers State Chief Executive Rt. Hon. Chibuike Rotimi Amaechi in his address made it clear that the problem he has with Ateke Tom was the gun he was hitherto carrying. This did not go down well with the repentant militant leader as he made



*Arms and Ammunition Surrendered*

## Few Hrs to Expiration of Amnesty Ateke Tom, Tompolo, others Surrender

*By Joe Kalu*

to grab the microphone from the Secretary to the State Government (SSG) Muagnus Abe to probably reply him immediately.

The ugly development was arrested by the security agents who intervened. The Governor however promised to accept and rehabilitate them back into the society in the interest of all. The Defence Minister, Maj.-Gen Godwin Abbe (rtd) who doubles as the Chairman of the Presidential Committee on Amnesty in his speech said peace was essential for development urging all to give peace a chance. According to him, "God loves Nigeria, considering the volume and caliber of arms and ammunition coming from the creeks through the amnesty". He assured that all the issues that made the youths of the Niger Delta to carry guns is known to President Yar'Adua and that he is ready to address them. Also speaking, a Presidential Adviser and former NDDC Managing Director, Timi Alaibe appealed to the oil companies to support the process by way of training and logistics to ensure that the youths who are qualified graduates are employed where vacancies exist as well as scholarship for others to further

their education, adding that the Federal Government cannot do it alone.

According to him "the gallant and noble youths (ex-militants) should be supported to make progress in life and should be accepted back into the society for their lives to change for the better from violence to non-violent culture".

In his speech, the Okrika based Militant leader Ateke Tom who spoke in Pidgin English expressed happiness with President Yar'Adua whom he said he met on October 1, 2009 for the first time in course of embracing the amnesty, describing him as a very sincere leader who wants the Niger Delta and other parts of Nigeria to develop. He however dissented on the controversial issue of waterfronts demolition insisting he does not agree with the government. Ateke Tom further declared "I dey disarm today. We no dey fear. We trust our President (Yar'Adua) I swear I never see am before, but by the time I go see am for Abuja na im I know say he is sincere and concerned about Niger Delta problem.

Make everybody disarm make President Yar'Adua solve our problem for us in Niger Delta.

No better schools, hospitals, no good roads, no water to drink, no job for qualified graduates and youths. The President knows all these problems. He go solve them for us.

For Rivers State we get problems, people don become governor before, today we dey see magic governor who wants to kill everybody, no be people like Ateke Tom no way. Let government empower Niger Delta people we don suffer too much" he declared. On his part, Chief Government Ekpemu-kpolo alias Tompolo had expressed anger against FG over the recent militancy invasion of Ijaw Communities in Abaramatu Kingdom in Warri, South-west LGA of Delta State and the killing of innocent persons and destruction of property worth billions of naira. He declared that though "all" his arms and ammunition have been surrendered to the FG but the Niger Delta struggle would continue in order to put an end to the neglect of the oil-rich region".