

NEWS EXTRA

ExxonMobil Suspends Workers over Dec 2016 Violent Protests

Company's workers insist on indefinite strike

Ejiofor Alike in Lagos and **Okon Bassey** in Uyo

Mobil Producing Nigeria Unlimited, an affiliate of ExxonMobil, has suspended some workers who allegedly threatened the lives of other staff and damaged the company's property in the December 16, 2016 protest.

THISDAY gathered that the suspension of some of the

workers for one month, pending the outcome of the investigation into their alleged roles in last year's violent protest, has fuelled a fresh three-day warning strike by the workers.

The workers, however, alleged that their three-day warning strike was in protest against the alleged flouting of the local content Act by the company and sacking of Nigerian workers, among other

issues.

The workers under the aegis of the Petroleum and Natural Gas Senior Staff Association of Nigeria (PEN-CASSAN) had also threatened to embark on an indefinite strike last Monday if nothing was done to address the lingering issues.

However, a top official of the company told THISDAY off record yesterday that the workers' grievances were as a result of the one-month suspension slammed on workers who threatened the lives of others and damaged the company's property in December 2016.

According to the official, the disciplinary action was part of the recommendations of the committee set up by the Minister of State for Petroleum, Dr. Ibe Kachikwu, to look into the workers' grievances.

'Part of the committee's recommendation was that the company was at liberty to set in motion disciplinary actions against the workers who damaged the company's property and threatened the lives of others. Every staff of the company signed a commitment to shun violence in the workplace. They are employees of the company first before becoming union leaders and members. The other things recommended by the committee have been implemented. The company is now implementing the recommendation on disciplinary action and those who participated in the violent protest have been suspended for one month with pay to enable the company investigate their roles and come up with final decision. But because these guys feel that they are union members and

are above the law of the company, they became angry and brought up the issues that have been resolved and embarked on fresh strike,' the official explained.

But the Vice Chairman, Exxonmobil branch of PEN-CASSAN, Mr. Gbenga Ekanudayo, had alleged that the oil company was in the practice of disengaging Nigerian workers and replacing them with expatriates, thus encouraging capital flight. Ekanudayo accused the company of breaching the agreement reached after the interventions of Kadikwu, the national union and other stakeholders.

Meanwhile, the Akwa Ibom State branch, of PEN-CASSAN yesterday announced plan to embark on indefinite strike in the state.

Also, the oil and gas association has passed a vote of no confidence on the Managing Director of ExxonMobil, Mr. Paul McGrath, for the suspension of workers in the oil company.

The decision to embark on the strike and the vote of no confidence on McGrath were reached by members of the PEN-CASSAN after their congress and protest march held at the vicinity of Mobil Producing Nigeria (MPN), Lagos gate in Ibevo Local Government Area of the state.

The resolution of the association was made available to journalists yesterday at a press briefing held in Mkarank, Ibevo Local Government Area of the state by the National Deputy President of PEN-CASSAN, Mr. Jude Chidinwaogu.