

**COMMISSION OF NOBEL LAUREATES
ON
PEACE, EQUITY AND DEVELOPMENT IN THE NIGER DELTA REGION OF
NIGERIA**

The *Commission of Nobel Laureates on Peace, Equity and Development in the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria* is an endeavor of the Elie Wiesel Foundation for Humanity (EWF). The Commission is an objective and independent body beholden to no government or enterprise. Recommendations are intended to mitigate human suffering and prevent violence that could engulf Nigeria and spill over its borders.

Background

The Niger Delta region includes 6 states of which Bayelsa, Rivers, and Delta states produce the most oil and suffer from significant violence. The region is a maze of creeks, streams, and swamps formed by the Niger River as it divides into 6 main tidal channels before spilling out into the Atlantic Ocean. Before oil was discovered by Royal Dutch Shell near the village of Oloibiri in 1956,¹ the Niger Delta region had the most extensive lowland tropical and fresh water forests, aquatic ecosystems, and biodiversity in West Africa.² Residents cultivated rice, sugarcane, plantain, palm oil, yams, cassava, and timber.³ At least seven million Ijaw, Ogoni, Itsekiri, Andoni, Ibibio and a host of other peoples speaking distinct languages live in Bayelsa, Rivers, and Delta states alone. Most of the oil and gas reserves are found on Ijaw territory.

Windfall

Since 1970, Nigeria has earned at least \$300 billion from energy development. It took in \$45 billion in 2005 alone. With about 40 billion barrels of proven oil reserves, Nigeria currently produces about 2.4 million barrels of oil/day. It is estimated that Nigeria will produce 4 million barrels/day by 2010.⁴ It is also home to the world's seventh largest supply of natural gas.⁵ Nigeria's low-sulfur oil – so-called “sweet” crude – is much sought after by refineries in the United States, which purchases about 40% of current production.⁶ Nigeria provides 11% of U.S. oil.⁷ It is the fifth largest source of oil for the United States.

Environment

The U.S. Department of Energy estimates that over 4,000 oil spills discharging more than two million barrels of crude have occurred in the Niger Delta since 1960.⁸ Oil slicks cover the

region. Blow-outs and leaks affect creeks, streams, and related traditional sources of livelihood, poisoning the water supply, destroying mangrove forests, eroding soil plots, and killing aquatic life.⁹

Hundreds of well-sites have flares, which come from the burning of associated gas. The flares heat up everything nearby and turn day into night, releasing 25 million tons of CO₂ and 12 million tons of methane annually.¹⁰ Resulting sulfuric acid mists damage plants and forests.¹¹ Flares pollute rain water, cause acid rain,¹² and contribute to climate change.¹³

Many residents suffer from oil poisoning. Crude oil enters the body through skin absorption, ingestion of food and water, and inhalation of oil and dust particles.¹⁴ Oil poisoning also causes respiratory ailments.¹⁵ In addition, residents suffer from a plethora of water borne diseases such as malaria, dysentery, tuberculosis, typhoid, and cholera.¹⁶ Life expectancy is low and child morbidity rates are high.¹⁷

Poverty

According to the United Kingdom's Department for International Development, "Nigeria has some of the worst social indicators in the world."¹⁸ For example, the World Bank estimates that 92.4% of Nigerian women are living on less than \$2/day in 2006.¹⁹

Though the Niger Delta's energy assets provide nearly three-quarters of government revenues and roughly 90% of foreign exchange earnings, they have not resulted in socio-economic development. Unemployment hovers at about 90%. Many schools and hospitals lack staff, equipment, and necessary supplies.²⁰ Most riverine areas remain unconnected to electricity grids. Bayelsa State has only one multi-lane, paved road in the entire state, which leads only to the capital. In April 2006, President Olusegun Obasanjo promised a \$1.8 billion road-building project for the Niger Delta region. No action was taken. Many Niger Delta residents see his pledge as yet another opportunity for elites to enrich themselves with "bogus contracts."²¹

Violence

Disenfranchised by rigged elections in 1999 and 2003, many youths have joined local militias that sabotage oil facilities and kidnap oil workers. In Rivers State, the governor encouraged the creation of militia groups as his private army. Though violence has been sporadic to date, radicalization is on the rise with some groups threatening to disassociate from Nigeria unless the government satisfies demands for political rights, economic development, and social justice.

Many young people are migrating from their villages to Port Harcourt and other urban areas. The Niger Delta region has the highest incidence of HIV/AIDS in Nigeria; prostitution and teenage pregnancies are on the rise.²² There is also a spiral of hooliganism, robbery and spontaneous violence.²³

The Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta, among others, vows to continue attacking oil installations and Nigerian military units until oil assets are brought under local

control. Impoverished and hopeless youths are fed up with the present state of affairs, which degrades the environment and loots local wealth. As a result of recent violence and the kidnapping of international oil workers, Nigeria's overall production of petroleum has been reduced by 25%.

At the official level, President Obasanjo has named two peace envoys: human rights activist Fr. Matthew Kukah for the Ogoni dispute with Shell, and Ken Wiwa, son of slain Ogoni leader Ken Saro-Wiwa, for the region as a whole. Delta NGOs have undertaken a variety of dialogue and conflict prevention initiatives. However, civil society representatives warn that violence will escalate if the Nigerian authorities do not address its root causes. The detention of community leaders, like Dokubo Asari, might also spark further conflict.

Governance

Nigeria's military governments centralized control of the oil industry under the presidency. The 1969 Petroleum Act transferred all energy earnings to the federal government and the 1978 Land Use Act assigned all land ownership to state governments.²⁴ The 1999 Constitution further vests predominant powers in the executive branch. The constitution does, however, stipulate that 13% of oil revenues be returned to the oil-producing states in addition to their share of revenues distributed to all 36 states. President Obasanjo also serves as oil minister, thereby limiting public scrutiny of the country's corrupt oil sector.²⁵

Corruption

Corruption undermines economic growth, jeopardizes financial stability, and undermines confidence in government institutions. It also leads to criminality that has corrosive effects on governance and the rule of law. Transparency International ranks Nigeria 152 out of 159 countries in its corruption index.²⁶ Federal and state governments have stolen or wasted \$380 billion since the country became independent in 1960.²⁷ The culture of corruption is pervasive affecting state government as well as local officials; 31 of the 36 state governors are currently under investigation for crimes and corruption.²⁸

The fact that Nigeria's coffers are awash in oil revenue further fuels corruption by national and local political elites. All state government allocations are given directly to the governor by the federal government, who is then supposed to distribute funds to local governments. Allocations to state governments are sizable. Rivers State, for instance, received \$74 million and Bayelsa State \$57.6 million in July 2006.²⁹ In practice, governors withhold large portions of such allocations for dubious projects, which are frequently awarded to cronies. Kingpin politicians are the primary beneficiaries of oil bunkering operations.

For example, the governor of Bayelsa State was recently impeached for corruption. It was discovered that he used public funds to acquire several multimillion dollar properties in the United Kingdom, set-up seven British bank accounts, and buy a yacht. The Rivers State governor has bought two private jets, a helicopter, and a host of private properties.

Under scrutiny, the governor of Rivers State announced that he was allocating \$20 million for a new Rivers State Sustainable Development Program. Bayelsa State has promised a similar initiative. Such efforts are welcome, but still amount to a drop in the bucket considering the fact that the federal government distributes almost \$1 billion/year from oil profits to Rivers State.

Elections

Local and international monitors reported ballot stuffing and tally altering during elections in 1999 and 2003. According to the European Union, the 2003 elections fell far short of international standards for a free and fair ballot. Opposition parties were shut out of nearly all layers of government leaving voters with no real political choices and no alternatives for social action. Election victors in the Niger Delta, nearly all members of the ruling Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), are firmly aligned with party barons that put them in office.

Serious concern exists about elections scheduled for April 2007. There is widespread speculation that President Obasanjo's supporters may provoke a national crisis to justify a delay or annulment. The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) is grossly unprepared and, in a strategy of calculated incompetence reminiscent of 2003, local monitors warn that INEC could declare that it is unable to organize the election, and thus give President Obasanjo the opportunity to declare a state of emergency and extend his term in office.

Oil Companies

Shell, Mobil, Chevron, Agip, Elf, and Texaco are major partners with the Nigerian National Petroleum Company, which retains 55-60%³⁰ of earnings from joint ventures and heavily taxes the balance.³¹ These companies have been criticized in recent years for their environmental practices in the Niger Delta. They have also drawn fire for assisting the Nigerian military and endorsing its heavy-handed tactics.³²

Kidnappings of Nigerian and foreign oil workers have increased in recent years. In 2004, Shell acknowledged that its business practices had inadvertently contributed to conflict, poverty, and corruption.³³ Shell and several other oil companies have sought to address the situation by taking steps to improve their human rights practices and channel more development funds directly to communities.

The Nigerian Extractive Industries Initiative (NEITI) holds companies and the government to a series of rights standards and best practices. It also requires regular audits. The first such audit was held in 2005. In early 2006, the federal government revealed a significant discrepancy between what the oil companies paid to government and what the government recorded. Community leaders routinely complain that promised funds often do not arrive, or that the companies do not follow through on their commitments.

A local NGO leader warns: "The people are tired of government corruption, killing and stealing. Frustration is rising and things are getting worse. There is real concern about an outbreak of violence across Nigeria. Violence will explode, especially in the Niger Delta, if there is any rigging or attempts to stop the election."³⁴

The Way Forward

Fundamental problems must be addressed to reduce the likelihood of conflict escalation:

- The people of the Niger Delta have no duly elected representation at any level of government and thus have no formal political voice.
- The Niger Delta produces the majority of Nigeria's wealth, but still enjoys only a small portion of its returns.
- The rise of the militias in the Niger Delta is a direct result of massive unemployment and lack of socio-economic development.
- Wealth earmarked for the Niger Delta is substantial, but it is largely stolen by politicians and their supporters who benefit from continued crisis.
- The Niger Delta's ethnic diversity has been manipulated by political leaders to keep communities from collaborating on region-wide initiatives.

Nigeria's new government can demonstrate its credibility by taking the following steps:

Elections

The 2007 elections must not become the spark that ignites the Niger Delta's simmering fuse. Under no circumstances should the elections be postponed or the constitution amended to prevent the peaceful transition of power. The international community should impress upon President Obasanjo the opprobrium Nigeria would face if he manipulates events to try to hang onto power.

Nigerians must be confident that the electoral process is free and fair. To this end, the international community should support Nigerian monitoring groups and deploy large numbers of international monitors across the country, including to the Niger Delta states. Monitors should not parachute-in, but, rather, stay in-country until all the votes are counted and the results are verified. International donors can also help by supporting voter education and providing technical assistance to INEC. Nigerian authorities should facilitate the registration of international election monitors. Empowering an ombudsman to receive complaints from civil society representatives and INEC personnel about irregularities would enhance transparency and accountability. Special attention should also be paid to protect the free functioning of political opposition parties.

Corruption

Nigeria's federal and state governments should more adequately resource official anti-corruption bodies such as the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC). Donors should also finance NGOs working in the field of anti-corruption. To show that it is serious about cracking down, the government should prosecute high-profile violators, including presidential allies. Reducing the number of officials covered by constitutional immunity would demonstrate that no one is above the law. Setting-up regional branches of the national anti-corruption commissions and a new anti-corruption ombudsman – supported by passage of the

Freedom of Information Act – would help enhance the watchdog function of local communities.

Development

More equitable development is critical to mollifying aggrieved Niger Delta residents. The 2005 NEITI audit of oil revenues should be published ensuring that oil companies in NEITI are fulfilling their obligations. Remaining companies that have not signed onto NEITI should do so. To make sure that government projects actually meet local needs, civil society groups should be more extensively involved in development planning by government agencies and international donors. Oil companies can enhance socio-economic development by training and hiring local residents. They could also establish a “Community Investment Fund” channeling a specific percentage of gross revenues directly to local community organizations working in the fields of health, education, micro-credit, and infrastructure development.³⁵ The Niger Delta Development Corporation (NDDC) should be eliminated in order to reduce bureaucracy. Eliminating the NDDC would also enable more funds to be channeled directly to community associations, in a context of proper auditing and community oversight.

Environment

The Community Investment Fund could also support clean-up, conservation and restoration activities. In addition, oil companies should clean up oil spills and eliminate gas flares. They should also provide special compensation to communities devastated by environmental degradation. The expanded use of renewable energy technologies would further reduce dependence on fossil fuels thereby limiting damage to local ecosystems.

Security

It is unrealistic to expect local militias to disarm, demobilize and reintegrate until after upcoming elections. Even then, Nigerian authorities will have to take verifiable steps to address problems before local militias give up the gun. Meanwhile, oil companies can start building confidence by phasing out their security payments to official security agencies and militia groups, emphasizing instead “community based security” for site protection. Future disarmament efforts should be based on a sustainable package of amnesty, weapons buyouts, job programs, and sensible law enforcement initiatives.

Methodology

This report is based on field interviews and secondary research. International and Nigerian experts have also contributed.

Signatories

We, the undersigned Nobel laureates, associate ourselves with the enclosed findings and recommendations (as of December 1, 2006):

George A. Akerlof
Nobel Prize, Economics (2001)

Johann Deisenhofer
Nobel Prize, Chemistry (1988)

Eric R. Kandel
Nobel Prize, Medicine (2000)

Philip W. Anderson
Nobel Prize, Physics (1977)

Christian de Duve
Nobel Prize, Medicine (1974)

Aaron Klug
Nobel Prize, Chemistry (1982)

Richard Axel
Nobel Prize, Medicine (2004)

Richard R. Ernst
Nobel Prize, Chemistry (1991)

Herbert Kroemer
Nobel Prize, Physics (2000)

Kenneth J. Arrow
Nobel Prize, Economics (1972)

Edmond H. Fischer
Nobel Prize, Medicine (1992)

Sir Harold W. Kroto
Nobel Prize, Chemistry (1996)

J. Georg Bednorz
Nobel Prize, Physics (1987)

Val Fitch
Nobel Prize, Physics (1980)

Leon M. Lederman
Nobel Prize, Physics (1988)

Baruj Benacerraf
Nobel Prize, Medicine (1980)

Jerome I. Friedman
Nobel Prize, Physics (1990)

Jean-Marie Lehn
Nobel Prize, Chemistry (1987)

Paul Berg
Nobel Prize, Chemistry (1980)

Sheldon Lee Glashow
Nobel Prize, Physics (1979)

Yuan T. Lee
Nobel Prize, Chemistry (1986)

Günter Blobel
Nobel Prize, Medicine (1999)

Clive W.J. Granger
Nobel Prize, Economics (2003)

Craig C. Mello
Nobel Prize, Medicine (2006)

Sydney Brenner
Nobel Prize, Medicine (2002)

Paul Greengard
Nobel Prize, Medicine (2000)

Robert C. Merton
Nobel Prize, Economics (1997)

Thomas R. Cech
Nobel Prize, Chemistry (1989)

David Gross
Nobel Prize, Physics (2004)

Robert A. Mundell
Nobel Prize, Economics (1999)

Steven Chu
Nobel Prize, Physics (1987)

Roger Guillemin
Nobel Prize, Medicine (1977)

Erwin Neher
Nobel Prize, Medicine (1991)

Aaron Ciechanover
Nobel Prize, Chemistry (2004)

Leland H. Hartwell
Nobel Prize, Medicine (2001)

Marshall W. Nirenberg
Nobel Prize, Medicine (1968)

John M. Coetzee
Nobel Prize, Literature (2003)

Dudley R. Herschbach
Nobel Prize, Chemistry (1986)

Douglas D. Osheroff
Nobel Prize, Physics (1996)

Claude Cohen-Tannoudji
Nobel Prize, Physics (1997)

Avram Hershko
Nobel Prize, Chemistry (2004)

Harold Pinter
Nobel Prize, Literature (2005)

Mairead Corrigan Maguire
Nobel Prize, Peace (1976)

Antony Hewish
Nobel Prize, Physics (1974)

John C. Polanyi
Nobel Prize, Chemistry (1986)

Robert F. Curl Jr.
Nobel Prize, Chemistry (1996)

Roald Hoffmann
Nobel Prize, Chemistry (1981)

José Ramos-Horta
Nobel Prize, Peace (1996)

Burton Richter
Nobel Prize, Physics (1976)

Irwin Rose
Nobel Prize, Chemistry (2004)

Jens C. Skou
Nobel Prize, Chemistry (1997)

John E. Sulston
Nobel Prize, Medicine (2002)

Gerardus 't Hooft
Nobel Prize, Physics (1999)

Daniel C. Tsui
Nobel Prize, Physics (1998)

Klaus von Klitzing
Nobel Prize, Physics (1985)

John E. Walker
Nobel Prize, Chemistry (1997)

Elie Wiesel
Nobel Prize, Peace (1986)

Frank Wilczek
Nobel Prize, Physics (2004)

Betty Williams
Nobel Prize, Peace (1976)

Kurt Wüthrich
Nobel Prize, Chemistry (2002)

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- ¹ Okonta, Ike and Oronoto Douglas, *Where Vultures Feast: 40 Years of Shell in the Niger Delta*. Sierra Club books, 2001, 72.
- ² Ibid., 83-5.
- ³ Ibid., 85.
- ⁴ “Gas Flaring in Nigeria: A Human Rights, Environmental and Economic Monstrosity.” Environmental Rights Action/Friends of the Earth Nigeria: Amsterdam, June 2005, 4.
- ⁵ Interview with government officials in Bayelsa State by David L. Phillips, August 2006.
- ⁶ Okonta, Ike and Oronoto Douglas, *Where Vultures Feast: 40 Years of Shell in the Niger Delta*. Sierra Club books, 2001, 74-5.
- ⁷ “Gas Flaring in Nigeria: A Human Rights, Environmental and Economic Monstrosity.” Environmental Rights Action/Friends of the Earth Nigeria: Amsterdam, June 2005, 8.
- ⁸ <http://www.eia.doe.gov/emeu/cabs/nigenv.html>
- ⁹ Okonta, Ike and Oronoto Douglas, *Where Vultures Feast: 40 Years of Shell in the Niger Delta*. Sierra Club books, 2001, 106.
- ¹⁰ “The Ijaws, the Niger Delta and the Nigerian State,” Ijaw National Congress, June 2006, 20.
- ¹¹ Okonta, Ike and Oronoto Douglas, *Where Vultures Feast: 40 Years of Shell in the Niger Delta*. Sierra Club books, 2001, 111.
- ¹² Ibid.
- ¹³ “Gas Flaring in Nigeria: A Human Rights, Environmental and Economic Monstrosity.” Environmental Rights Action/Friends of the Earth Nigeria: Amsterdam, June 2005, 19-23.
- ¹⁴ “The Ijaws, the Niger Delta and the Nigerian State,” Ijaw National Congress, June 2006, 21.
- ¹⁵ Okonta, Ike and Oronoto Douglas, *Where Vultures Feast: 40 Years of Shell in the Niger Delta*. Sierra Club books, 2001, 112.
- ¹⁶ Ibid., 256.
- ¹⁷ Ibid., 112.
- ¹⁸ <http://www.dfid.gov.uk/countries/africa/nigeria.asp>.
- ¹⁹ See <http://devdata.worldbank.org>.
- ²⁰ “Niger Delta Regional Development Master Plan.” N+D Consortium, August 2005, 5.
- ²¹ Interview with Professor Jean Hershkovits, State University of New York, November 3, 2006.
- ²² Okonta, Ike and Oronoto Douglas, *Where Vultures Feast: 40 Years of Shell in the Niger Delta*. Sierra Club books, 2001, 257.
- ²³ Ibid., 257.
- ²⁴ Ibid., 34.
- ²⁵ Interview with government officials in Bayelsa State by David L. Phillips, August 2006.
- ²⁶ Transparency International, Annual Report. 2005.
- ²⁷ Council on Foreign Relations. “Singing the Delta Blues.” October 2006.
- ²⁸ BBC News. See: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/5387814.stm>
- ²⁹ Nigerian Federal Ministry of Finance. See: http://www.fmf.gov.ng/fileupload/state_FAAC_July2006.pdf
- ³⁰ Okonta, Ike and Oronoto Douglas, *Where Vultures Feast: 40 Years of Shell in the Niger Delta*. Sierra Club books, 2001, 75.
- ³¹ Ibid., 68-71.
- ³² Ibid., 80.
- ³³ Interview with Dr. Darren Kew, Boston University, October 30, 2006.
- ³⁴ Anonymous interview, November 10, 2006.
- ³⁵ Up to 5% of gross revenue would be suitable, given the absorptive capacity of local groups.