

## **AN ADDRESS TO THE UNITED NATIONS WORKING GROUP ON IN INDIGENOUS POPULATIONS, JULY 1992**

Madam Chairperson,

I wish to thank you for offering me the opportunity of addressing the tenth session of the working Group on Indigenous population....I speak on behalf of the Ogoni People, a distinct ethnic nation within the federal republic of Nigeria. You will forgive me if I am somewhat emotional about this matter, I am an Ogoni. Ogoni territory lies on 404 square miles of the coastal plains terraces to the north-east of the Niger Delta. Inhabited by 500,000 people, its population density of about 1,250 per square miles is among the highest in any rural area of the world and compares with the Nigeria national average of 250.

The Ogoni have settled in this area as farmers and fishermen since remembered time and had established a well organized social system before the British colonialist invaded them in 1901. Within 13 years, the British had destroyed the fabric of Ogoni society. British rule in the area was "haphazard" and no treaties were signed with the Ogoni. By 1960 when colonial rule ended, the British had consigned the Ogoni wily-nilly to a new nation, Nigeria, consisting of 350 or so other people previously held together by force, violence and much argument in British's commercial and imperial interest.

The nation which the British left behind was supposed to be a federal democracy, but the federating ethnic nations were bound by few agreements and the people were so desperate, so culturally different, so varied in size that force and violence seemed to be the only way of maintaining the nation. In the circumstance, the interest of the few and weak such as the Ogoni was bound to suffer and has suffered.

Petroleum was discovered in Ogoni in 1958 and since then an estimated US 100 billion dollars worth of oil and gas has been carted away from Ogoni land. In return for this, the Ogoni people have received NOTHING.

Oil exploration has turned Ogoni into a wasteland; lands, streams, and creeks are totally and continually polluted; the atmosphere has been poisoned, charged as it

is with hydrocarbon vapors, methane, carbon monoxide, carbon dioxide and soot emitted by gas which has been flared 24 hours a day for 33 years in very close proximity to human habitation. Acid rain, oil spillages and oil blow-outs have devastated Ogoni territory. High pressure oil pipelines criss-cross the surface of Ogoni farmlands and villages dangerously. The result of such unchecked environmental pollution and degradation include the complete destruction of the ecosystem. Mangrove forests has fallen to the toxicity of oil and are being replaced by noxious nypa palms; the rain forest has fallen to the axe of multinational oil companies, all wildlife is dead, marine life is gone, the farmlands have been rendered infertile by acid rain and the once beautiful Ogoni countryside is no more a source of fresh air and green vegetation. All one sees and feels around is death. Environmental degradation has been a lethal weapon in the war against the Indigenous Ogoni People. Incidental to and indeed compounding this ecological devastation is the political marginalization and complete oppression of the Ogoni and especially the denial of their rights, including land rights. At independence, Nigeria consisted of three Regions. Since then, 39 states have been created largely for the ethnic majorities who rule the country. Most of the states so created are unviable and depend entirely on Ogoni resources for their survival. The demands of the Ogoni for autonomy and self-determination even within the Nigerian nation have been ignored. The Ogoni have been corralled into a multi-ethnic administrative state in which they remain a minority and therefore suffered several disabilities. Mining rents and royalties for Ogoni oil are not being paid to the Ogoni people. In spite of the enormous wealth for their land, the Ogoni people continue to live in pristine conditions in the absent of electricity, pipe-born water, hospitals, housing and schools. The Ogoni are being consigned to slavery and extinction.

Madam Chairperson, faced by these terrible odds, the Ogoni people have continued courageously to demand for social justice and equity. In October 1990, the chiefs and elders of Ogoni submitted a Bill of Rights to the Nigerian president and his Council. The Bill called for (a) Political control of Ogoni affairs by the Ogoni people. (b)The right to use a fair proportion of Ogoni economic resources for Ogoni development (c)Adequate and direct representation as of right in all

Nigeria national institutions (d)The use of Ogoni language in Ogoni territories (e) The right to religious freedom and (f) The right to protect the Ogoni environment and ecology from further degradation. The Ogoni are yet to receive a reply to this minimum demand.

Copies of the Ogoni Bill of Rights and a book, GENOCIDE IN NIGERIA: THE Ogoni TRAGEDY authored by me which explains the Ogoni case fully have been submitted to the secretariat of the Working Group. The extermination of the Ogoni people appears to be policy. The Ogoni have suffered at the hands of military dictatorships which have ruled Nigeria over the past decades. The new constitution which supposed to usher in a democratic government in 1993 does not protect the right of the Ogoni. Indeed, it institutionalizes the expropriation of their land. A recently-concluded national census omits all references to the ethnic origins of all citizens which in a multi- ethnic State is a violation of community rights.

Nigeria has an external dept of over 30 billion dollars; None of that dept was incurred on any project in the Ogoni area or on the project remotely beneficial to the Ogoni. The International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, keen on the payment of the dept, are encouraging intensified exploitation of oil and gas which constitute 94 per cent of Nigeria's Gross Domestic Product. Such exploitation is against the wishes of the Ogoni people as it only worsens the degradation of the Ogoni environment and the decimation of the Ogoni people. Studies have indicated that more Ogoni people are dying now than are being born. The Ogoni are faced by a powerful combination of titanic forces from far and near, driven by greed and cold statistics. Only the International Community acting with compassion and a sense of responsibility to the human race can avert the catastrophe which is about to overtake the Ogoni. The Ogoni people are now appealing to that community to:

- 1. Prevail on the American Government to stop buying Nigerian oil. It is stolen property.
- 2. Prevail on Shell and Chevron to stop flaring gas in Ogoni.

- 3. Prevail on the Federal Government of Nigeria to honor the rights of the Ogoni people to self-determination and AUTONOMY.
- 4. Prevail on the Federal Government of Nigeria to pay all royalties and mining rents collected on oil mined from Ogoni since 1958.
- 5. Prevail on the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund to stop giving loans to the Federal Government of Nigeria; all loans which depend for their repayment on the exploitation of Ogoni oil resources.
- 6. Send urgent medical and other aid to the Ogoni people.
- 7. Prevail on the United Nations, the Organization of African Unity and the Commonwealth of Nations to either get the Federal Government of Nigeria to obey the rules and mores of these organizations, face sanctions or be expelled from them.
- 8. Prevail on European and American Governments to stop giving aid and credit to the Federal Government of Nigeria as aid and credit only go to encourage the further dehumanization of the Ogoni people.
- 9. Prevail on European and American Governments to grant political refugee status to all Ogoni people seeking protection from the political persecution and genocide at the hands of the Federal Government of Nigeria.
- 10. Prevail on Shell and Chevron to pay compensation to the Ogoni People for ruining the Ogoni environment and the health of Ogoni men, women and children.

National ideas of national independence, the fact of Africans ruling Africans in nations conceived by and for European economic interest have intensified, not destroyed the propensity of man to subject weak people by force, violence and legal quibbling to slavery and extinction. I respectfully invite you to visit Nigeria, so that you can see for yourself and Indigenous peoples bound there and that

they suffer incredibly at the hands of rulers and the economic interest of other nations.