

# OILWATCH ALERT NIGERIA 2004

## 1. WARRI: SOLDIERS, YOUTHS IN BLOODY CLASH /21 wounded

*From Onwuka Nzeshi in Warri, 11.22.2004*

About 21 persons were shot and wounded at the weekend when irate youths clashed with armed soldiers in an attempt by the militant agitators to seize and occupy an oil flowstation at Ojobo, Burutu local government area of Delta State. THISDAY checks revealed that the youths numbering over 200 swooped on the Benesede flowstation, but they were swiftly resisted by armed security personnel who set out to dislodge them.

Before the incident, THISDAY learnt that youths of Ojobo had been at loggerheads with the Shell Petroleum Development Company (SPDC) over the oil multi-national's community relations policies and practices. The youths and a cross section of the community claimed the Anglo Dutch oil firm (Shell) and her agents were not fair to the community considering the quantum of oil drilled from their land and rivers.

Beneseide flow station, produces about 75,000 barrels of oil per day from 45 oil wells. Elders of the community were said to have been meeting with representatives of Shell and a contracting firm, Parker Drilling with a view to resolving the differences. One account said that it was during one of such meetings that the youths attacked soldiers who were monitoring the meeting. According to the account, the meeting was to enable the oil company and the community leaders draft a memorandum of understanding (MOU) to pave way for a cordial relationship between both parties and advert whatever crisis there was to be.

Trouble was said to have started when youths of the community vehemently opposed the position of the oil company on certain vital aspects of the MOU, especially areas dealing with youths empowerment and employment. Elders at the meeting were said to have tried in vain to calm down the situation but it soon degenerated into fisticuffs as armed security personnel monitoring the deliberations moved in to restore order.

Military sources claimed that some of the youths engaged the soldiers in physical combat and tried to seize their rifles. The exchange resulted in the release of a volley of bullets by the equally enraged soldiers. At least 21 persons reportedly sustained gun shot wounds and were subsequently conveyed to Shell clinic, Oguru for emergency medical attention. However, hours after, a group of youth leaders from the troubled town issued a statement alleging that over 20 of their kinsmen have been gunned down by soldiers on the orders of Shell.

But Public Relations Officer of the Joint Task Force, Major Saheed Hammed, in a chat with THISDAY yesterday evening denied the allegation levelled against the soldiers.

Also reacting to the incident yesterday, Shell's corporate external relations manager, Mr. Don Doham, confirmed the incident but explained that the shooting incident occurred on the rig which the youths forcefully occupied. Boham said the youths invaded and occupied Rig 75 and that they vacated the facility as at press time.

"They occupied the rig belonging to Parker Drilling and demanded immediate commencement of community development projects, a review of the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) as well as direct dealing with service contractors to review work contract for six of their members," said Boham. The rig, he said, was working for SPDC at her Benisede Well 22 when the youths invaded it. Boham further explained that only 17 of the invading youths sustained injuries in their scuffle with armed security personnel. He also told newsmen that those injured have been treated while dialogue is continuing between the traditional ruler and community representatives on one hand and officials of Shell on the other.

There have been frequent clashes between youths agitating for more welfare packages for their communities from oil companies and members of the Joint Task Force comprising of men of the armed forces set up by government to guarantee security of operations by the firm.

The youths have also accused government of neglecting their communities which suffer degradation as a result of oil drilling while the people also lack basic amenities and employment opportunities.

To drive their points home, the youths have resorted to taking expatriates working at drilling sites as hostages or seizing oil rigs. The resort to criminal activities in the agitation for their rights have often led to frequent clashes with military men.

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Speak up for people who cannot speak for themselves. Protect the rights of all who are helpless. Speak for them and be a righteous judge. Protect the rights of the poor and needy."(Proverbs 31:8-9, GNB)  
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**Fuente:** Comunicado Oilwatch Internacional .- Jueves, 25 de Noviembre de 2004  
2. TOWARDS LASTING PEACE IN THE NIGER DELTA / PUBLIC STATEMENT

**October 3, 2004**  
(For Immediate Release)

Nigerians in the Niger Delta have witnessed a progressive escalation of violence during the past 15 years, which we understand as expressions of the deepening crises in the country.

It is the Nigerian state that creates the crises and initiates violence in the Niger Delta area:

- We note that in 1990 the government of Nigeria and Shell sent mobile policemen to massacre community people at Umuechem who were engaged in peaceful protest against the devastation of their lands and the destruction of their livelihood by the Nigerian state and Shell.
- In the 1990s, with the backing of Shell, the Nigerian government engaged in a pogrom in Ogoni for peacefully asking for justice within the Nigerian state.
- From 1999, the Nigerian military started occupying Ikwerre Communities in Rivers State and Ijaw communities in Bayelsa State to stop peaceful community protesters. In the process hundreds of innocent community people were killed. Some of them by soldiers using helicopters belonging to transnational oil companies.
- For over 40 years, the Nigerian state and the oil companies have destroyed the means of livelihood of millions of our peoples leading to impoverishment, frustration and deaths.
- Starting from 2001, state sponsored militia groups have been responsible for thousands of deaths and the destruction of many communities in Rivers State.

During the past week, global attention was directed at our region due to threats by an armed organisation, the Niger Delta Peoples Volunteer Force (NDPVF) to commence a rebellion against the Nigerian state and her oil and gas interests in the Niger Delta area. The NDPVF in making their threats made certain points and demands that were in consonance with the positions of the peoples of the Niger Delta area as have been expressed by different nationality and peoples' organisations in the area. For example, the Ogoni Bill of Rights, the Kaiama Declaration of Ijaws, Ikwerre Rescue Charter, Aklakla Declaration of the Egi People etc contained demands for social justice, restructuring of the Nigerian state to respect the rights of nationalities to self-determination and the convoking of a Sovereign National Conference for representatives of Nigerian nationalities and political groups to discuss the future of Nigeria.

The Nigerian government, in response and with the pressure from the "international community" and transnational oil corporations invited leaders of the NDPVF and another militia to meetings at Abuja and subsequently reached a "cease fire agreement" with the groups. The agreement endorsed a disbandment and disarmament of the groups that met with the government.

We wish to respond to the Abuja agreement as follows:

1. The individual groups are at liberty to sign an agreement with the Nigerian government.
2. The present violence in Rivers State was created by the Government of Rivers State, and therefore, must be resolved by them. It follows that any parley convened to solve this problem must not be confused with the larger issue of self-determination, resource control and environmental justice for the Niger Delta peoples.
3. The signatories to the Abuja agreement are not representative of the entire organisations of peoples of the Niger Delta area. Neither did they consult with other groups in reaching the said agreement.
4. The agreement did not in anyway address the demands of the peoples of the Niger Delta nor the imperative of lasting peace in the Niger Delta region, which is social justice.
5. The representative organisations of the Niger Delta nationalities and other organisations involved in peaceful resistance to the violence of the Nigerian state and the transnational oil companies will continue with their struggles.
6. The main sponsor of violence in the Niger Delta area remains the Nigerian state and her political overlords that have stolen leadership with fraudulent elections and who are continuing the criminal looting of resources of the country leaving the Nigerian people in impoverishment and death.
7. The present national and state governments and their assemblies are not in anyway representative of the people as they were not democratically elected. Nor are they capable of resolving the crisis in the Niger Delta and Nigeria. Many of the gangs responsible for criminal activities and killings were established, funded and armed by serving political office holders at the local, state and national levels. We are being ruled by hoodlums in power.
8. We restate our commitment to the popular convocation of a Sovereign National Conference (SNC) as one peaceful option to a resolution of the crisis in Nigeria characterised by state failure, institutionalisation of violence and mass impoverishment. Organisations of peoples of the Niger Delta and people oriented political groups will work towards the convocation of a Pan-Niger Delta Conference to mobilise our peoples to resist state sponsored violence and prepare for the SNC.

Signed by:

1. Asume Osuoka, Chikoko Movement

2. Uche Okwukwu (COPLIP)	Congress for Liberation of Ikwerre People
3. Uchegbu Karl Chinedu	South-South Zone, Civil Liberties Organisation
4. Kingsley Kpea	Rivers Coalition
5. Barr. Chima Williams	Public Interest Lawyers League
6. Comrade Che Ibegwura	Egi Ethnic Coalition
7. Kalada Jene	Bonny Indigenous Guide

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**Fuente:** *Comunicado Oilwatch International .- Jueves, 07 de Octubre de 2004*

### 3. SHELL FIRE RAZES COMMUNITY FORESTS & FARMS

#### a) HIGHLIGHTS

- Community Forests Farmlands & Fishponds go up in Flames
- Hunger, Refugee crises looms
- Shell refuses to stop spill
- Shell's kill-and-go Police invade communities

#### b) BACKGROUND

Rukpokwu is a vast rural community in the Ikwerre ethnic nationality in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria; it is administratively located in the Obio/Akpor Local Government Area of Rivers State. The livelihood sources of the people are farming, fishing and hunting. Shell started its operation in the community in 1963 with the laying of the Rumuekpe - Rukpokwu trunk line (the facility that caused the latest inferno). The trunk line runs through the heart of the community and other nearby ones.

#### c) AN EXPLOSION TOO MANY

A huge explosion occurred on December 3, 2003 at an area in the Rukpokwu community called Mini-Ihie. Several houses in the community, flood forests, farmlands, ecological sanctuaries, habitats, plants and animals surrendered to the raging inferno. 61-year old Mr. Woke, a father of 9 children and a hunter, farmer and fisherman from the affected community is full of tears and anger.

He cried to ERA saying, "I was going to my farmland with my wife, Mrs. Grace Woke, around the Mini-Ihie (where the incident occurred) to harvest cassava and check my traps in the Mini-Ihie forest to see whether the traps had caught some bush pigs and grass cutters we use for food. At about 10.00

a.m., just in front of us we heard a huge explosion and suddenly bad odour of gas mixed with fuel, and later a big tongue of fire ravaging nearby farmlands, forests, including my own. See! All my farmlands of cassava, traps, and fishponds are all burnt. How will I feed my 9 children now?"

#### **d) SHELL'S POLICE SEIZE COMMUNITY**

On December 3, 2003 immediately after the incident occurred, a delegation of the Community visited Shell office in Port Harcourt and reported the matter. And in the early hours of December 19, 2003, Shell's high-powered "investigating team" with over 200 battle-ready mobile Policemen stormed the community unannounced. Mr. Joseph Mgbakiri, a fairly educated 48 years old, a well-known community leader and father of 3 children takes a swipe at Shell's alleged belligerency and penchant for violence against the poor unarmed community people.

Hear Mgbakiri,

"On December 19, 2003, Shell did not even inform us that they were coming. They invaded our community with over 200 armed Mobile Policemen. Shell knows what these Mobile Police had done in this part of the country and can still do. Initially, they had spread the rumour that it is sabotage and since such theory could not work, they are now silent over this incident. The truth of the matter is that the pipeline is too old; it was laid in 1963 and since then, they have not changed it. I personally led the delegation to Shell. When they were coming, they did not even inform us. The place where the incident occurred is an open and accessible place. They can't say anybody is stopping them. Even Shell had even commended us in one of their publication that we are a good community. But I can't understand their attitude. They came in as if we are at war. Do we have guns to fight? Shell should treat us as civilized people. They went round the place and merely covered the affected spot with sand. The place is still leaking".

#### **e) ERA'S OBSERVATION**

The explosion is unprecedented in the history of spills in the community. Apart from the December 3, 2003 explosion, ERA's investigations revealed that there have been other spills at the affected facility.

On May 20, 1996, an explosion occurred at the facility. On July 18, 2003 at the same spot, another major explosion occurred too. In all these spills above, Shell has not demonstrated corporate accountability and citizenship.

ERA observed that the burnt area was an ecological sanctuary with all sort of unique animal and plant species, such as monkeys, bush pigs, grass

cutters, mahogany, Iroko trees, etc. A whole lot of these creatures were either burnt or deserted the area. This could be a massive bio-diversity tragedy.

Apart from the Rukpokwu community, the following communities were also affected - Mgbuche, Elikpokwuodu, because of the presence of a rivers system that flows into one another.

#### **f) ERA'S RECOMMENDATION**

SPDC should take immediate steps to halt the spill arising from the explosion, clean the mess and overhaul its old facilities to forestall any further re-occurrence.

Shell should send relief materials and pay compensation to the rural people who are affected by the incident.

The company should demonstrate good citizenship, accept their liability and avoid corporate deceit, violence, and arrogance in Rukpokwu community and other parts of the Niger Delta.

#### **g) WHAT YOU CAN DO**

Send protest letters to SPDC to stop the spill, clean it and overhaul its facility in the area to avoid further devastation of the rural environment and people. It should also send relief materials and pay compensation to the people.

Send copies of your letter to Local and International media, environmental groups to mount campaigns against such environmental malpractice by Shell.

Speak up against corporate insensitivity and greed.

Send copies of your letter to Federal and State Ministry of Environment and also legislators (If Nigerian) representing your constituency to raise issues of environmental concerns as a critical part of their mandate to the people of Rukpokwu community.

Mails to Shell can be sent to:

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**Fuente:** Comunicado Oilwatch Secretariat .- Jueves, 08 de Enero de 2004