



26 April 2024

TEXT OF PRESS CONFERENCE BY THE COALITION FOR A CLEANED NIGER DELTA (CCND) ON THE CLEANING UP OF THE NIGER DELTA AND RESOLVING THE PREVAILING ENVIRONMENTAL GENOCIDE

1. Nigerians rightfully deserve to live in a society that boasts of peace, human security, and prosperity in the conviction that all Citizens and Public Officers have a duty to make every constructive contribution towards truly attaining these goals.

2. As part of a wider civil society and environmental leadership movement, we call on our President to uphold his sworn commitment to national renewal by calling for swift action to resolve the Ecocide (Environmental Genocide) in the Niger Delta, that increasingly threatens the continued existence of the entire region, undercuts the full economic potentials of our country, and constantly hangs national security on high risk levels.

3. We trust our president is well aware that the ecosystem of the Niger Delta has for about seventy years been plagued by unprecedented perennial pollution from petroleum production activities, enabled or worsened by a highly dysfunctional, conflicted and compromised environmental regulatory system, since the country struck commercial oil in the Oloibiri Province prior to Nigeria's Independence. This festering devastation has projected and ranked Nigeria's Niger Delta among the worst oil and gas polluted regions in the world.

4. By the very limited official records of Nigeria's spill detection body (National Oil Spill Detection and Response Agency – NOSDRA), there were 16,263 (sixteen thousand, two hundred and sixty-three) oil spills within the 17-year period of 2006 to 2023.

This accounted for about 823,483 (eight hundred and twenty-three thousand, four hundred and eighty-three) barrels of oil spilt, equivalent to 4,103 (four thousand, one hundred and three) tanker trucks or 130,933,797 (one hundred and thirty million, nine hundred and thirty-three thousand, seven hundred and ninety-seven) litres of crude oil, from NOSDRA data. These figures are a fractional slice of the reality, as they exclude 5,456 (five thousand, four hundred and fifty-six) spills for which the spiller companies did not provide NOSDRA with estimates of spilled quantities. Besides, estimates are usually and "understandably" grossly suppressed by operators. Data for some mega spills, like the Aiteo blowout at OML 29 that lasted for 38 (thirty-eight) days in November-December 2021, are also omitted.

t: +234 906 975 6927 & +234 817 370 6095

Office: #30, 19th Street, off Ugbowo-Lagos Road, Opposite UNIBEN Campus, P.O. Box 10577 | Ugbowo,

Benin City 300212, Nigeria



5. Furthermore, it would be noticed that NOSDRA's conservative spill statistics cited above do not include data for all of 50 (fifty) years from 1956 when Oloibiri Well 1 was spudded, till 2006 when NOSDRA was created. We also omitted gas volumes flared continually for 68 (sixty-eight) years, and the equally deleterious millions of barrels of toxic effluents/"produce water" discharged untreated into the rivers, swamps and mangroves as waste in the course of production. If allowance is made for these omissions and non-disclosures, easily one billion litres of crude oil equivalent have been released into the Niger Delta ecosystem as the price paid by communities there for Nigeria's oil production.

6. The catastrophic condition of the region's environment is globally notorious and too well documented to require further reiteration. One of the latest expert reports on it (titled AN ENVIRONMENTAL GENOCIDE: The human and environmental cost of Big Oil in Bayelsa, Nigeria) was released two weeks to the inauguration of Mr. President last May, by the high-level international panel constituted by the Bayelsa State Government, whose steering body includes former President John Kufour of Ghana, Baroness Valerie Amos (former UN Under Secretary-General and UK Secretary of State), and the former Archbishop of York, Baron John Sentamu.

7. The stack of shocking reports on the ecological destruction of the region from petroleum extraction also includes the 2011 United Nations (UNEP) Environmental Assessment of Ogoniland, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Report on Biodiversity in the Niger Delta, reports by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (commissioned by the oil giant, Shell, itself), the 1997 Niger Delta Environmental Survey (also commissioned by Shell), series of reports by Amnesty International and Friends of the Earth, and studies conducted by the BRACED Commission (constituted by the Governments of Bayelsa, Rivers, Akwa Ibom, Cross River, Edo and Delta States).

6. Considering the apparent failure of a long line of Presidents, Petroleum and Environment Ministers, and Chief Regulators, to recognize the indescribable gravity of this ravage, its severe socioeconomic and security repercussions for Nigeria, and to comprehensively resolve it, we invite Mr President to pay a spot visit, along with the relevant Ministers and Regulators, and possibly the National Security Adviser, to some of the following locations, which are too few as examples of devastation, to see for yourself: Polobubo and Ogulagha in Delta State; Ibeno, Mbo and Ikot Ada Udo in Akwa Ibom State; Awoye in Ondo State; Bille, Obagi and Rumuekpe in Rivers State; and Gbarain/Ekpetiama, Nembe, Aghoro and Otuabagi (where Nigeria's pioneer oil wells are located) in Bayelsa State.

7. Amidst the global dynamics of the 21st Century, and particularly in the context of climate change/action, Nigeriacannot continue to act as if ignorant of the importance of its biodiversity endowments and ecological imperatives. There are many countries we can benchmark, which produce more oil, gain far higher revenues from it, but still jealously and profitably protect their environment and ecosystems. Norway which has a trillion-dollar Sovereign Wealth Fund from petrodollars (and population of 5.5 million, against Nigeria's 228 million) is a prime example, but ensures its waters stay pristine, enabling its robust fishing and marine industries. Scotland and the UAE are others.

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8. We trust that Mr President and the government are mindful of Nigeria's numerous commitments to international treaties and conventions, including those on universal rights, environmental and indigenous people's rights, and climate change. Mr President's commitments to a world audience at the UN Climate Conference (COP 28) in Dubai, UAE, barely four months ago are also fresh in mind. A genuine action to cleanup the Niger Delta will be an excellent progress report for Nigeria, and particularly for Your Excellency, as the world gathers again at the next Climate Conference, COP 29, in about six months from now.

9. The protracted social injustice of funding national development at such extreme ecocidal expense of communities in the oil-producing Niger Delta region, or communities wherever else in Nigeria, needs to be urgently redressed, without any pretences as witnessed under previous Administrations. With the ongoing divestment of their remaining onshore holdings in Nigeria by the major international oil companies (IOCs), and their huge outstanding environmental liabilities thrown into legal uncertainty, thereby portending further risks and escalation of social tensions for communities, the time for Mr President to act as the Protector-in-Chief of Nigerian communities is now.

10. IMMEDIATE BUT LASTING SOLUTIONS:

We recommend that to resolve the environmental crisis and create an unprecedented legacy in the Niger Delta and Nigeria in general, amongst other cardinal priorities, the following actions should be taken:

10.1 The President should Issue an Executive Order creating a Niger Delta Environmental Remediation Programme and Trust Fund. This can be either independent of or domiciled in the extant Hydrocarbon Pollution Remediation Project (HYPREP) currently overseeing the cleanup of Ogoni Land, but with a separate Trust Fund from the Ogoni Trust Fund, an expanded Governing Council and an unimpeachable Management system designed to avoid the contradictions that have historically bedeviled HYPREP and the debatable progress of the Ogoni Cleanup. The tasks of the Programme would include a definitive health audit besides the standard environmental audit of impacted areas.

10.2 Adoption of the National Principles on Divestment and Decommissioning in the Nigerian Oil Industry in line with the one recently compiled by a wide coalition of community, civil society and international organizations, following extensive field missions and engagements in the Niger Delta.

10.3 Panacea for Oil Theft and Asset Vandalization: To avoid or minimize re-pollution, optimize production and abate associated insecurity, enact a carefully articulated approach to this economic crime (based on broad and in-depth stakeholder consultations, which we are prepared to be part of if required). The new strategy should be preventive, proactive, inclusive, accountable, and look beyond current official reliance on state and non-state military methods that can often be tragically counterproductive, as results have shown intermittently.



11. **FUNDING SOURCES:** Combined with the Federal Government's financial latitudes, the primary funding should be from the operators and JV partners in oil/petroleum leases, based on credible costings for remediation within their respective acreages and in line with the universal Polluter Pays Principle (PPP). Additional funding sources could include (I) the Environmental Remediation Fund created but yet to be operationalized under the Petroleum Industry Act, (II) gas flare penalties paid by operators, (III) part of the existing Ecological Fund, at least to cover immediate region wide impact and cost assessments, (IV) a portion of the statutory funds of the Niger Delta Development Commission, whose statutory mission expressly includes an ecological/pollution resolution mandate that is largely neglected since its inception, (V) Decommissioning liabilities and restoring funds in oil mining agreements and (VI) international environmental, climate and impact funds/resources that can be leveraged through appropriate strategies and channels.

12. **THANK YOU:** Halting the ecological genocide in the Niger Delta and other areas ravaged by the scars of extractivism is a task that cannot be postponed. We call on Mr President and his team to do the needful and give Nigerians a safe environment to live and flourish in dignity.

God bless Nigeria.

Signed

Nnimmo Bassey, MFR — Executive Director, Health of Mother Earth Foundation (HOMEF)

Otive Igbuzor — Founding Executive Director, African Centre for Leadership, Strategy & Development (Centre LSD)