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Curbing Youth Restiveness In The Niger Delta

By

Alice Ukoko

About Alice Ukoko

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Alice Ukoko is a human right defender who has devoted her entire active life since 1994 to the campaign to end human rights abuses in Nigeria and to being the “voice” for African women and their families.

The focus of her work has been to raise the awareness of the international community to the human right abuses going on in Nigeria and the Niger Delta in particular. Visit www.aliceukoko.org to read about one woman’s work to save a Nation of 150 million people.

Haven campaigned to end direct military rule in Nigeria, Alice Ukoko now wishes to extend her commitment to enthroning enduring democracy in Nigeria further. She wishes to lead a transparent government of reconstruction in Delta State from May 2007. This she hopes will give her the opportunity to lay the foundation of a modern Delta State.

She wish to affirm my belief in Nigeria and to say that, as man is perishable, the Almighty God who created and Blessed Nigeria (Niger Delta) shall “ARISE” to judge us all.

If you are a believer in God then please READ: Isaiah chapter 10: from verse 1 to 34.

Alice Ukoko is not a religious fanatic but she believes that there is a God who shall arise and judge us all whether we believe in Him or NOT.

Alice Ukoko
LLB (Honours) London

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Introduction

The Niger Delta is the Oil producing region. Although considered a minority region of the country, the Niger Delta is represented by eight State of modern Nigeria namely; Akwa Ibum; Bayelsa; Cross River; Delta; Edo and Rivers States. 20 million people of more than 40 ethnic groups, speaking around 250 dialects live in the Delta.

Geographically, the Niger Delta is spread over 70,000 km and makes up 7.5% of Nigeria’s land mass.

The Willink Commission set up by the British Government before Nigeria's political Independence recognised the need for Nigeria to pay special attention to the region by recommending amongst others that there should be a Body set up specifically for the development of the Niger Delta.

Although OMPADEC and presently the Niger Delta Development Commission were Bodies established for the purpose, none have been effective as they lack "good faith" by the

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The proliferation of small arms in the region is a major cause for concern, that the volume of small arms in circulation is a major cause of the on going militancy in the region was noted by the former Commander of the joint Task Force in the Niger Delta. According to him in an interview with newsmen in Warri in March 2006, "there are so many arms in the hands of youths in the Niger Delta that needs to be recovered immediately because failure to do so portends grave danger for security and continued unity of this Nation" He also observed that the region is under developed and advised the Federal Government to **develop the region.** (Vanguard, Lagos March 20, 2006)

To arm aggrieved youths is to condemn Nigeria and the Western Region of Africa of insecurity and grave dangers.

The Federal Government must recall the small arms used for the 2003 elections without further delay and begin dialogue with the people of the Niger Delta.

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As long as the Needs of the youths and the people of the Niger Delta are ignored, the reach for peace in the region would fail.

Thus, to curb youth's restiveness in the Niger Delta, credible Niger Deltans and Nigerian with integrity **MUST** be allowed into the political playing fields. This will ensure that the provisions of the Nigeria's Constitution are applied in tackling the problems of the region.

To continue to re-cycle individuals who have failed in the past is to reinforce the failings of past Governments. This ed practice is the **ROOT**

CAUSE of the Nigerian problem. This will continue to endanger the unity of Nigeria and security in the Western region of Africa and World Peace Order.

Nigeria is a country of 150 million people. Nigerians are contributing to the development of the world in their various countries. They can contribute also to peace and development of Nigeria and the Niger Delta.

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Federal Government. Thus, the Commissions fail to deliver on their developmental mission for the region. In both cases, appointment of principal officers of the Bodies have appeared to be based on "patronage" rather than appointment for effective delivery of the aim and objectives as recommended by the Willink Commission.

Although rich in crude oil and natural gas, a large area of the region is made up of wetland, freshwater swamp forests, lowland rain forests and coastal sand ridge barriers. It has been suggested that about 75% of the Delta is riverine. Many communities experience "flooding" during the rainy seasons while others face constant fears of being swept into sea.

The discovery of crude oil in the region has had adverse environmental impact on the environment and therefore the lives of the people of the region. As people whose means of livelihood is fish and vegetable farming, the destruction of the environment through exploration of oil without "due care" has meant

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that the region has been exposed to "slow death" over 48 years.

The river has been greatly polluted as chemical waste and other hazardous waste is constantly dumped. On Shell Nigeria's own admission, "...and also improve operational practices environmentally, by stopping disposal of produced effluent water into the Warri river"...(Shell's letter dated 11.5.98 to the Military Administrator of Delta State)

There are constant oil spillages due predominantly to ageing pipes laid above ground under intense heat from the sun. There is inadequate or no maintenance of these pipes. Rather than modernise operational methods to protect lives and the environment, the Multinational Companies depend on their "hard line posture" claiming that oil spillages are occurring due to

the people's sabotage of Companies equipments. The Companies rarely take responsibility for oil spillages and thereby refuse to clean up spillages and or, compensate communities affected.

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Unrest in the Niger Delta poses a serious threat to the unity of Nigeria and a grave danger to security in the Western region of Africa. Yet, Nigerian Governments' continue to focus its attention on the flow of crude oil and natural liquid gas flowing from the region.

To the majority of Nigeria's politicians and their friends, the richness of the Niger Delta is their personal God given wealth. Hence the preoccupation of successive Governments has been to:

Increase production to meet the oil demands of Western Government such that the individuals in Government continue to enjoy the cooperation and friendship of foreign Governments to enable them cover up their atrocities against the people of the Niger Delta.

Increase their personal fortune through revenue accruing to the Nation that they convert and distribute for their personal use.
As long as "fake" politicians and their friends

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How can a Nation be governed by people who depend on "supernatural powers" be tolerated in a civilised world? You need to read "TELL" edition No. 3 January 17, 2005. Captioned: "Exclusive" **Kalu Took Us To Okija Shrine!** By Ex – Special Adviser Amah Abraham Nnanna. Interview By AYODELE AKINKUOTU and WILSON UWUJAREN. (A COVER Interview) (Kalu has been the Governor of Abia State since 1999)

This satanic practise appears to run through the entire nation since 1999.

The present Nigerian Administration is celebrating its creation of "foreign reserves" when the majority of the Nigerian people are living in absolute poverty level. Relatives living in the Diaspora provide food for the majority of people living in Nigeria.

My heart bleeds for Nigeria my country constantly.

To Curb Youths Restiveness in the Niger Delta we must return to the "Drawing Board"

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Oil spillages have led to community fires claiming many lives in the Niger Delta.

In 1998, Jesse town in Delta State was destroyed by fire ignited by petrol leakage. Over 1,000 lives were lost. While the horror of the disaster was being watched by the world, the Nigerian Government was condemning the people of the Niger Delta for stealing petrol. No one was compensated.

The people of Adedje (Oviri Court of Delta State suffered the same fate when oil spillage led to the destruction of over 1,000 lives. While the fire was burning and lives being lost, the Nigerian Authority told the world in a radio interview that the people of the Niger Delta were being punished by God for stealing petrol.

Because of the hard line posture of Government and the Oil Companies, many victims died hiding from the Authorities for fear of being arrested. When I visited the Oviri Court community in 2000, the representatives of the community conveyed to me their frustration and sadness at the failure of Government and Shell

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Nigeria to show concern for the loss of lives and the destruction of their land by the fire.

According to the community leaders, the Nigerian government and the Oil companies have refused to listen to them. No one was compensated and no one faced charges for the loss of lives and properties caused by the fires.

Fires from spillages have affected Ijala, Ifiekporo; Ekapkamre and Aja – etan communities of Delta State. In all the fires, the Nigerian Government and the Oil Multinationals remained indifferent to the dangers that their operations pose to the environment and lives in the Niger Delta.

No Nigerian Government has ever taken an interest in the protection of the environment and lives of the people of the Niger Delta. Instead, the

governments have worked with the Oil Multinationals to repress the people through brutal force.

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A Nation Surviving on Borrowed Time

Nigeria is surviving on borrowed time. Otherwise, how can a country of 150 million people continue to tolerate successive Governments that blunder, loot and repress the people with impunity? How can a nation that is amongst the world's rich, be amongst the world's poorest countries?

Nigeria is a country in contradictions. On the one hand, political office holders take "Oath" to protect and uphold the supremacy of the Constitution and do just the opposite of what the Constitution prescribes?

Why is Nigeria being governed by people who swear with the Bible in the one hand go to Shrines to make others take oath of allegiance to them?

"Curbing Youths Restiveness in the Niger Delta"

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To expect the people of a region that is making the country's wealth to continue to continue to live in absolute poverty, whilst their wealth is being used to develop other parts of the country and enrich individuals in political offices and their friends without a struggle for freedom, is naïve and unrealistic in a "Real" world.

I believe very strongly on Nigeria as one Nation, but that unity must be founded on justice for all the people of our nation regardless of which region of the country to come from.

I believe that there is a political solution to the problems of Nigeria and the Niger Delta. But those in political positions must be prepared to put aside their self-interest for the country to survive. There is a need to create a positive environment for peace and justice to reign.

Those who armed the youths for their personal interest stand "condemned" and they need to take full responsibility for the outcome of their selfish endeavours.

History will judge us all as the evil that we do now will live after us.

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Chapter 2. Section 20 of Nigeria's 1999 Constitution provides thus: "The State shall protect and improve the environment and safeguard the water, air and land, forest and wild life of Nigeria"

Why is the Nigerian Government so indifferent to the destruction of the environment in the Niger Delta?

Considering that following the Jesse fire disaster in 1998, the BBC interviewed Nigerians in Nigeria including Chief Olusegun Obasanjo at his Otta Farm the Chief was asked to react to the plight of the people of the Niger Delta. He responded if I remember correctly. **"They are spending the money like it is going out of fashion"** implying that even he, recognises that the Niger Delta is being neglected, whilst the revenue that is coming from the region was being wasted and looted by Governments Although he himself had been the Head of the Nigerian State and did nothing for the Niger Delta.

Chief Olusegun Obasanjo was again sworn into office as a civilian President on 29th May 1999.

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During 1999, he ordered a military invasion of Odi in Bayelsa State. The military invasion destroyed Odi and claimed many lives. History shall judge us all.

The people of the Niger Delta are historically crops and fishery farmers and thus, heavily reliant on the soil, river and the sea for their livelihood. However, due to the richness of its crude oil and liquid gas, they are no longer able to depend on the soil for their crops and the river and the sea for their fishing enterprise.

Public transportation includes motor vehicles; motorcycles and engine boats.

Population Profile:

The region is populated by numerous ethnic nationalities most of whom are competing for prominence against each other. Ethnic nationalities have lived with one another and inter married for centuries, but have become “arch enemies” in recent years. Each competing against one another thus, creating man – made obstacles to achieving a “united front” against

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the re-enactment of the direct military era in Nigeria’s recent past.

Curbing Youths Restiveness in the Niger Delta will be “wishful thinking” if the inhumanity of the Nigerian State and the multinational companies against the people of the Niger Delta carries on.

Freedom is never gotten on the platter of gold, as long as some individuals hold the people of the Niger Delta in a state of “constant war” while denying them the right to be respectable human beings, their struggle for survival will continue and intensify.

The South Africans fought for their freedom at the face of dangers. Many died but the struggle continued until they became free and recognised in their own country as equal members.

(40)

The Zimbabweans when under the oppressive regime as Southern Rhodesia fought for their freedom.

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As usual, all I can do is continue to hope that one day, my people will wake up from their slumber to realise that their destiny and that of their children is in their own hands.

Those who make wars should be prepared to fight their wars. Arms were distributed to hungry youths who should be given the opportunity to contribute to the economic growth of the country.

The only thing that will save Nigeria is for those responsible for the “rot” that is now Nigeria to be called to account for their evil did.

The impatience of Niger Delta youths is not the only problem facing Nigeria at the moment. As long as the political future of the country is clouded the more difficult it would be to predict the future of the country with any precision.

We are yet to face religious up rising stemming from political uncertainties being created by the on-going political manoeuvring amounting to

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the Oil Multinational Companies and the majority nationalities of the country.

“Curbing Youths Restiveness in the Niger Delta”

Youths’ restiveness in the Niger Delta is a recent phenomenon, which is not isolated in present day Nigeria. Since independence, Nigeria has been through one emergency after another with successive governments adopting military repression tactics rather than seek lasting solution to the many problems, which continue to threaten the unity of the country.

This hostile posture of Governments could be traced to the historical existence and political independence of Nigeria amongst others.

Existence As A Nation:

Nigeria is the amalgamation of the Niger Delta with the rest of the country by Britain’s **Lord Lugard in 1914**. Thus, creating a country out of diverse regions.

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It is argued by some that this ill thought out amalgamation by the British brought together regions that have no understanding of what the people of other regions are going through.

Nigeria is thus, made up of regions and peoples with very different cultural practices, ecological make up, environmental challenges and divergence religious beliefs.

Political Independence:

Nigeria gained political independence from Great Britain in October 1960 following what has since been revealed as “a rigged first election in 1959. If what has been said of the “election fixing” is to be believed then, it would follow that the foundation on which Nigeria’s political independence was built was flawed and thus, needed correction by Nigerians past and present.

Was Nigeria’s Independent Election Rigged?

To avoid distraction, let us pretend that the revelation about the rigging of Nigeria’s first election in 1959 was a distortion of facts by the

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A country without credible leadership is like a people without vision. “For they shall surely perish no matter how long it takes”.

The lack of credible or, visionary leadership appears to have created a “vacuum” and nature dislikes “vacuum” Thus, the on-going restiveness of Niger Delta youths is a reaction to a deepening vacuum within the Nigerian State, which if left to persist would lead to an inevitable “death” of our beloved Nation.

It is painful to watch the reckless display of self-interest by some politicians in Nigeria as they prepare the stage for the slaughter of a country that belong to over 120 million people on the “alter” of personal interest”

Tempers are running high amongst the hungry masses of the nation that is so rich and yet so poor.

As the plan to “kill” Nigeria progresses unabated, the masses of the country will respond in unpredicted manner.

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minimum living wage, old age care and pensions, and unemployment, sick benefits and welfare of the disabled are provided for all citizens.

For Peace to reign, the international community MUST persuade the Nigerian Government to act justly, ensuring that the GOOSE that is laying the golden egg is not exterminated to protect the interest of the oil

consuming nations and that of some of those in political power in Nigerian only.

Revenue flowing from the oil wealth of the Niger Delta should be deployed to meet the needs of the people of the Niger Delta, the region that is laying the golden egg.

Youths Restiveness in the Niger Delta will be a thing of the past once some Nigerians in political positions in the country begin to understand that they are not immortal and greater than Nigeria’s Constitution.

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British Civil Servant Mr Harold Smith who said he has first hand knowledge of the facts. According to Mr Harold Smith’s testimony, British Governments have tried to “shut” him up to no avail as he Mr Harold Smiths continues to insist that the British Government in granting Nigeria political independence in 1960 distorted the facts to produce their desired result. He continues to “shout” For more information, hear from the 79 years old man himself by visiting his website: www.libertas.demon.co.uk

Nigeria’s Population:

Nigeria has an estimated population of around 120 million people making her Africa’s most populous Nation.

Nigeria is a major crude oil producing country with the bulk of the oil being produced by the Niger Delta region of the country. Officially, the region is believed to produce between 1.5 and 2 million barrels of crude oil every day.

Nigeria’s Revenue from Oil:

Oil represents over 90% of Nigeria’s National revenue, meaning therefore, that the Niger Delta

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is a major revenue source for the entire country. With a growing increasing in the price of crude oil in world market, it is therefore true to say that the Niger Delta is earning for Nigeria on average of **US \$18 billion every year.**

According to the Nigerian Punch Newspaper publication of Monday 12th January 2006 posted to the Web on 13.1.06, Oil fetches Niger N4.7 trillion in eleven months.

The Federal Government of Nigerian projects that crude oil would earn her \$20 billion by 2007 according to The Nigerian Punch publication of 05.01.06.

It is important to note that 2 million barrels per day production is a very conservative estimate, as the Nigerian Government has no means of working out how much oil the Niger Delta produces in any given day. In other words, Nigeria has not considered it necessary to develop “oil tracking mechanism” that would enable it determine the actual volume of oil being produced per day.

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Section 16

Subsection (1) The State shall, within the context of the ideals and objectives for which provisions are made in this Constitution:

Subsection (1) (b) The State shall Control the national economy in such a manner as to secure the maximum welfare, freedom and happiness of every citizen on the basis of social justice and equality of status and opportunity.

Subsection (2) “The State shall direct its policy towards ensuring...

(b) That the material resources of the nation are harnessed and distributed as best as possible to service the common good.

(c) That the economic system is not operated in such a manner as to permit the concentration of wealth or the means of production and exchange in the hands of a few individuals or, of a group; and

(d) That suitable and adequate shelter, suitable and adequate food, reasonable national

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be repressed by the Nigerian Government and the powerful Multinational Companies, **I dream of a time when the people of the Niger Delta and Nigeria as a whole will be FREE.**

Given the population of Nigeria and the volume of oil being produced by the Niger Delta for the country, it would be true to say that the greatest problem facing Nigeria is the enthronement of democracy geared towards the respect of the rights of the people of the country as one people as entrenched in the country’s **1999 Constitution.**

Examples:

Section 15

Subsection (4)

The State shall foster a feeling of belonging and of involvement among the various peoples of the Federation, to the end that loyalty to the nation shall override sectional loyalties.

Subsection (5)

“The State shall abolish all corrupt practices and abuse of power.

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That Nigeria is the 8th largest oil producer of the world is due to the oil richness of the Niger Delta region of the country. Unfortunately, although the region is so rich both in crude oil and Natural Liquid gas, the region is the poorest in the country. Even by Nigeria’s standard, the people of the Niger Delta are the most deprived, impoverished and neglected.

The environmental destruction of our land resulting from 48 years of oil exploration has condemned our people to a life of degradation and starvation. Fishes have died and our agricultural land has been rendered infertile. The people wallow in hardship and great sense of insecurity. Death lurks at every corner for the ordinary people of the region. Life in the Niger Delta is constant fear from security forces positioned by the Government to secure oil production and their looting enterprise.

There is unreported high unemployment of youths, in fact, a high proportion of active members of the population are unemployed.

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This has been at the root of the frustration that has been experienced and expressed in the Niger Delta.

In particular, a significant proportion of the unemployed youths are graduates, who are forced to watch the revenue from oil and natural liquid

gas being plundered while they wallow in poverty and a perpetual state of Hopelessness and frustration.

“Curbing Youths Restiveness in the Niger Delta”

Military Dictatorship

Nigeria for the most of her political independent life has been subjected to military rule under martial law. During this period, the people have lived as captured people, while those who were able to promote themselves to positions of political power through their military careers, civil politicians or political contractors, and continue to hold the rest of society hostage. They force the masses of the country, which are desperately poor to watch them live lavished lives with the nation’s wealth looted and stashed

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contribution to Nigeria’s civil rule. But that I was concerned the killing of my people, I told him that I want the killing to stop. I was very upset. I narrated the incident of the 9.3.04. I informed him that I had been in the Delta for about three weeks and found that every one live in FEAR. And if every one is living in fear who is started the fighting that kept military men in the region? I made the point that I am aware that there are invisible hands causing trouble for the people. And that it MUST STOP.

Nigerian youths became more militant, from the OPC in Lagos to Niger Delta youths.

Thus, to finger only Niger Delta youths is to completely misjudge the mood of the Nigerian State.

The situation created by Nigeria’s political class since 1999 seriously endangers the unity of the country to the extent that one wonders how much longer Nigeria can remain united.

The wealth of the Niger Delta region represents “strength” for the youths and the people of the region. Which although the region continue to

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and when the soldier saw that he could not kill him, he started to beat him using the head of his gun. This man was so badly beaten that he could hardly walk. He later went home where I met him that afternoon. I gave him Paracetamol for his pain.

In all, Nigeria’s soldiers without any reason killed over thirteen people that morning. Then the Police began to arrest innocent people going about

their business, alleging that these people were the cause of the killing. My heart bled for my country as I later watched the people pleading their innocence on television.

In my frustration I contacted one of Mr President’s advisers in Abuja asking to meet with him as a matter of urgency.

An appointment was booked for me to meet with him in Abuja the next day. At the meeting I could not hold back my anger at the killing of my people. I told the Chief that although I was at the forefront the civil rule they are enjoying, I had never gone to any of them asking for political appointment as a reward for my

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away in foreign banks. National wealth misappropriated for personal enjoyment while the majority of the people wallow in poverty.

Nigeria has a wealth of people prepared to destroy the country belonging to over one hundred people, for their personal gain.

The Military institution for many years, abandoned their traditional role of protecting the Nigerian people from foreign aggression. During this period, the people of Nigeria and particularly the people of the Niger Delta became the enemy of the Nigerian State.

Although Nigeria by all indications is a very rich country given the oil and liquid gas richness of the Niger Delta, it is estimated that over 80% of the population live below poverty line. For, although the daily oil production of the region is about 97% of Nigeria’s annual resources, there is no evidence of the wealth in the region that is creating such huge wealth.

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Civil War/Loss of 1m Lives: (1966 – 1970)

Six years into political independence, civil war broke out in Nigeria claiming over one million lives. The Nigerian civil war represents the first experience of restiveness in the Nigerian nation and the beginning or ethnic sentiments along regional divide.

One wonders, is hostilities between Nigeria's ethnic nationalities and religious bodies part of the British game plan in **1914** and then in **1959** that Mr Harold Smith witnessed and continues to alert Nigerians and the rest of Africa about?

The civil war was the beginning of Nigeria's political instability; military regimes, brutality and perpetual violence against the masses replaced the responsibility of the State for the people of Nigeria.

As military regimes replaced democratic systems of governments in alternate political successions, the people lost their "Freedom" and dignity to individuals and group of individuals who seized Power and with it, the control of the

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"Hell was let loose" there was reinforcement of soldiers who arrived the scene and began to shoot and kill people. They knocked on doors waking up youths who were not aware of what was going on and killed them.

According to the account by an eyewitness, as bullets were flying around, one hit a house where petrol was stored and set the house a blaze. This mayhem attracted people to the area, people who came to see what was happening.

A soldier was said to knock on a house to kill the youth there, his mother followed and pleaded for her son's life. The soldier shot and killed the son for the mother to witness before killing the mother.

My informant would have been killed too, but he cheated "death" as the bullets could not penetrate him. According to him, a soldier ran after him shooting at him, after running for a while the young said he decided to stop as he feared he could be killed after all. He said he asked the soldier why he was shooting at him

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amongst other crooked means during his time as the Inspector General of Nigeria's Police Force.

Arms once injected into circulation, it became impossible for the politicians to retrieve them.

Thus, resistance in Nigeria in general has become more "war like".

Soldiers killed about 13 people on 9th March 2004:

I was on my usual working in the Delta, when I was informed of an incident in Warri.

According to my informant, in the early hours of the day, a youth sat drinking and holding a gun on his lap. A soldier also carrying a gun confronted the youth. According to the information, the soldier shot and killed the youth.

Another youth who witnessed the incident was said to have expressed "shock" at what he witnessed. In response, using the gun belonging to the dead youth he shot and killed the soldier.

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Nation's wealth. Gradually, concepts such as: National interest was replaced with personal interest.

"Security was replaced with gross insecurity" "Justice" was replaced with "injustice and inhumanity" "Peace was replaced with Unrest and constant conflict"

"Curbing Youths' Restiveness in the Niger Delta"

It is true therefore, that although the Niger Delta produces the wealth of the Nigerian State, successive governments have watched with disdain the destruction that has gone on in the region. Gradually, the rate of absolute poverty in the region has risen to alarming proportion as the people's means of livelihood has been destroyed.

Thus, in spite of what amounts to the "cruelty" of a Brutal Nigerian State, the people of the Niger Delta have endured extreme degradation of their lives and land and strain of living without the means of doing so.

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Without concern for the people of the Niger Delta and their environment Nigerian Governments in succession, the Multinationals Companies maximized their focus on production levels at the expense of peace and protection of the rights of the people of the region. They intensified their strangled hold on the oil producing communities.

Having gained absolute power and authority over the host communities, Shell; Chevron/Texaco; NNPC and others have replaced co-operation and social responsibility with brutality and “divide and conquer” tactics in their dealings with the oil rich Niger Delta.

Individual Nigerians forming successive governments and holding positions of power and authority in the country exposed their desire to acquire wealth for personal use at the expense of the welfare of the people and their environment. A significant number of those in political power saw how much wealth they could make from crude oil for themselves and

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My arrest was even more challenging for me, I insisted that the proliferation of small arms in the country and in the Delta would create serious security problems for the country. More worrying for me at the time, was the fact that, by arming unemployed youths and “area boys” Nigeria’s political class created a very dangerous situation for the unity of the country.

Youths who before 2003, relied on “sticks” during confrontations with Nigeria’s Security forces can now use AK47s and rocket launchers to. I stood my ground with the Security Forces under interrogation. They had to release me.

“Curbing Youths Restiveness in the Niger Delta”

Thus, our mission to Nigeria in May 2003 was unsuccessful, the politicians and community warlords had their way. The then Inspector General of Nigeria’ Police Chief Tafa Balogun was later to stand trial for enriching himself during the 2003 election

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2003. I travelled with members of the Executive Committee of Women of Nigeria International now renamed (Women Of Africa) a charity based in the UK for the welfare of Nigerians in Nigeria and in the UK.

Our mission was to lead grass root women in a peaceful protest in Abuja against the proliferation of small arms in Nigeria following the 2003 elections.

The then Inspector General of Police Chief Tafa Balogun refused to give us permission to protest peacefully.

Although “permit” was refused and as such the protest did not hold, I was arrested and interrogated by the Delta State Security Forces on 23.5.03 in Warri on allegations that my presence in the country was to cause trouble amongst other allegations all of which aimed at discrediting me and giving the Security Forces grounds to arrest and detain me in Nigeria.

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their families that they became eager to gain political power by all means.

It would appear that this quest to acquire wealth for “personal wealth” by some in political power further make life extremely dire for the people of the Niger Delta. The need to use “brutal force” against the people became a common ground for the Oil Multinational Companies and the governments.

It became obvious that the Nigerian governments co-operated with the Oil Multinational Companies to brutalise the people of the Niger Delta. The mutual interest between the Nigerian Governments and the Oil Multinational Companies led to the constant use of Nigeria’s Security Forces against the armless civilians of the region producing the country’s wealth.

In a letter signed by the acting General Manager – Western Division (SPDC) E.N. Nwawka and dated 11.05.1998 wrote to is Excellency the then Military Administrator of Delta State asking him to intervene against the youths of

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Euemukohwarien and Effurun-Otor in Ughelli North and Ughelli who are the host communities to SPDC’s Ughelli Quality Control Centre...

Without doubt the intervention being sought by the Ag. General Manager of SPDC was military force against the youths of which the Nigerian Mobile Police Force is the most brutal and therefore preferred in repressions against the people of the Niger Delta.

SPDC in their letter to the Military Administrator, “The Ughelli Pump Station project was being embarked upon by SPDC to upgrade our ageing

crude oil transfer pumps at Ughelli Quality Control Centre (UQCC) and also improve operational practices environmentally, by stopping disposal of produced effluent water into the Warri river....”

This admission by SPDC confirmed the fact that chemical waste was being pumped into the Warri River, a fact that the Company continue to deny.

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Thus, for the 2003 elections in Nigeria, **AK47s** were distributed to employed youths including “area boys” for the purposes of ensuring that individuals already in political positions stayed in those political positions. Not because they have any positive programme for the people, but, because they appeared to have mastered the “art” of using violence to repress the people while they cart the people’s wealth to foreign Banks.

Thus, in May 2003 after the brutal act of staying in political power in Nigeria. Thus, the people were prevented from casting their votes in a free and fair election. At gun- point, ballot boxes were carried away to unknown destinations for stuffing. Gunshots were fired injuring civilians including children all in the name of political supremacy.

I received an appeal to travel to Nigeria on a mission to draw attention to the dangerous trend created by the 2003 election which had led to unprecedented proliferation of small arms in Nigeria. Thus, I was in Nigeria on 23rd May

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the street. As the soldiers collect their weapon of war, life returned to normal in Warri for that day.

“Curbing Youths Restiveness in the Niger Delta”

Although Nigeria is presumed to have returned to civil rule since May 1999, the Niger Delta remained a military zone. There have been military activities in the region as some State Governors have depended on military presence to stay in political power.

The constant military activities in the region have therefore made it impossible for the people of the region to enjoy peace of mind as normal human beings.

Before the 2003 elections, the youths had no small arms. Thus, like the youths in August 1998 if aggrieved the youths carried sticks. All of that changed when for the 2003 elections, small arms were imported into Nigeria and the Niger Delta in particular.

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Apart from pumping harmful chemical waste into rivers the Nigerian government, have kept a blind eye to the brutal force that have been used against the people of the Niger Delta. Nigerian governments deploring military force against the people of the region have worked with the Oil Multinationals to terrorize the hungry people.

Jedrzej George Frynas in his Study of “Shell in Nigeria” (1997) found that “on 29 October 1990, a Shell manager wrote to the Rivers State Commission of Police to request “security protection” in Umuechem wit a preference for mobile police. Two days later, the mobile police attached peaceful demonstrators with teargas and gunfire. On 1 September, the police returned shooting indiscriminately. Some eighty people were killed and almost 500 houses were either destroyed or badly damaged in Umuechem” According to J. George Frynas, “Shell denied any responsibility for the attacks in 1990, although it was later established that there has never been any threat to Shell operations and that villagers were peaceful.”

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In November 1995, the world witnessed the execution of Ken Saro Wiwa and eight others after many months of enduring military occupation with brutality of the people of Ogoni-land.

In **1999**, Nigeria’s President Obasanjo dispatched military troops to destroy Odi in Bayelsa State of the Niger Delta killing many youths and women. Military action against the people of Odi was ordered by Mr President to establish military stronghold over the people of the Niger Delta who continue to agitate for justice and equity in the sharing to the wealth from their oil wealth.

On 8th August 2002, grass root women of the Niger Delta were brutalised by Security Forces during their peaceful demonstration at the gates of Shell Nigeria and Chevron/Texaco. The women were demanding to dialogue with the management of the Multinational Companies to discuss the following amongst others:

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have spoken with their Commander. I reminded the soldiers that Nigeria was not “at war” and as such, I condemn their “war zone” activities in the centre of Warri. One suggested that I should be arrested and detained, as I appeared to be siding with the youths. I maintained my position that as Nigeria is not “at war” I condemn their position.

After a while, the Commander came out of the Bank and asked me why I was looking for him. I introduced myself as “an international human rights campaigner for my people’s rights and that I want him to call his men from the Streets of Warri as Nigeria is not “at war” The Commander hesitated and asked me for my card. I gave him a card. He asked me again what I wanted. I repeated my demand that I want him to call his men away from their “war against our youths” encounter and to restore peace to Warri.

The Commander appeared shocked by his encounter with him. He had a long look at me and asked me to go. As I turned to walk away, the military Commander ordered his men from

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spillage. Their mission I was told, was to stop the sharing of compensation money meant for the community. I pleaded with the youths to go home, as it was suicidal to confront the community leaders who are protected by such military might against them.

Luckily for me, the youths were pacified and abandoned their mission.

Secondly, I approached the military personnel minding the machine gun directed at the youths.

I asked the soldiers if they are trying to kill their own children. The soldiers appeared shocked by my courage and approach. I was advised to go to Oceanic Bank and ask to speak to their Commander who is inside the Bank and then I can register my objection with him.

I did as I was advised. On my arrival at the gate to the Bank, Nigerian soldiers paraded themselves with machine guns and appeared in a war like mood. As I approached them, they shouted at me ordering me to go away. Their “at war” posture and behaviour challenged me more. I insisted I was not going away until I

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1. The Multinational Companies’ lack of respect for their environment in particular, the women were demanding an end to Gas Flaring;
2. An end to the irresponsible chemical waste disposal that has devastating effect on their quality of health
3. The location of harmful chemical stations within their community (Ijala in Warri- Delta State);
4. The refusal of the Multinational companies to employ their husbands and sons in order to reduce the rate of unemployment and hence of a reduction of the rate of absolute poverty level in the Niger Delta.

The women were bravely calling on Shell and Chevron/Texaco to recognise their rights as their “host Communities” and to dialogue directly with them instead of through individuals posing as their agents. The women were adamant as to what they wanted from the Multinational companies.

The women were eager to exercise their rights under the many United Nations Resolutions, which recognise the need and the rights of

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women to engage in Conflict Resolution. (UN Security Resolution 1325 (2000) and the Beijing Platform for Action (1995) of which Nigeria is signatory.

Despite being signatory to the above international Instruments, Nigeria’s Security Forces brutalised Niger Delta women during their peaceful protest on 8.8.2002. Nigeria’s security forces acted in concert with the Multinational companies Shell Nigeria and Chevron/Texaco. The security forces deployed to the Shell Ogunu gate in Warri on that day, used teargas against women carry babies on their backs; old women were too old to run away from mobile police personnel waving hand guns and horse whip. It was a day I, Alice Ukoko will always live to “remember” being a co-victim of that unprovoked cruelty and brutality against women of the

Niger Delta whose wealth is being looted whilst they look on waiting to die from the chemical effect of the wealth.

That Nigerian government is at “War” with the people of the Niger Delta is without a doubt.

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In August 1998, during one of my working visits to the Delta, I witnessed the deployment of soldiers to Oceanic Bank in Warri. As the vehicle I travelled in approached Warri Motor Park, I saw people running and barricading themselves away in the Park. Machine guns were mounted on the main road with soldiers minding their weapon of war.

Confronted with a “war zone” situation in a busy area of Warri with people running at different directions, I became challenged. I got off the vehicle I was travelling in.

Firstly, I approached a “Tipper Lorry” carrying angry Ijaw youths holding sticks. As I pleaded with them to go home, they informed me that the soldiers had shot one of them and as such, they were not going home as they challenge the soldiers to kill them all. I asked what the problem was about; the youths informed me pointing to Oceanic Bank, that the soldiers are at the Bank guarding Ijaw community leaders who were at the Bank sharing compensation money meant for their community following oil

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