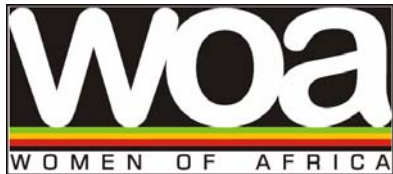


**The Tragedies of the
Oil Richness of
The Niger Delta Region
of Nigeria**



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**By
Alice Ukoko**

**10 Years after the execution of Ken Saro
Wiwa and the Ogoni eight**

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It is with great anxiety that I present the tragedies facing the women of the Niger Delta region of Nigeria as a result of the oil richness of our land. I am anxious also to present to you the grass root women's initiative aimed at installing justice, peace and development in the region.

As is my tradition, please allow me to pay tribute to the grass root women of Nigeria who continue to keep Nigeria alive. For, without the women's hard work and long suffering, Nigeria would not exist today. It is the market women who carry on trading in inhumane conditions to feed Nigeria's hungry children. It is the rural women who toil in the hot sun and in the stormy weather to put food on the "floor" for Nigeria's army of hungry children. Food that is not fit for dogs and cats in the civilised world. That is all mama can provide.

I salute my fellow countrywomen for their unfailing love for Nigeria and her next generation.

The focus of this write-up is the women of the Niger Delta who to my mind hold the key to the liberation of the country and beyond. For, it is the wealth of the women of the Delta that is creating the quest for wealth and power and hence the problem facing the masses of Nigeria irrespective of their region of origin.

Nigeria has an estimated population of over one hundred and twenty million. Although the 1991 Census puts the

population at one hundred and ten million, it is true to state that the density of the population as observed throughout the country as people go about their daily activities, suggests a far greater population than that recorded twelve years ago. Nigeria is the most populous country in Africa and by far the richest due to the wealth of the Delta region.

According to Shell Nigeria in 2000, the Delta occupies 70,000 square kilometres of landmass, interwoven or, criss-crossed by 7,000 kilometres of pipelines and flow lines. The region has over 624 oil producing Wells and 86 flow stations. There are ten Gas plants with a production capacity of 1280 Mbopd. And an average daily production of 744 Mbopd.

The estimated population of the Delta region has been put at seven million spread across forty ethnic groups and over 1,500 communities.

The traditional occupation of the people is mainly fishing and crop farming; thus, the Delta people have a high dependency on the river and their land.

The discovery of crude oil in the Niger Delta in 1955 and its exploration since June 1956 has become the source of man's inhumanity to man. The oil richness of the Delta has created a criminal greed and hence a quest for political

power, self- enrichment, irresponsibility and a lack of concern for Nigeria and her people.

Nigeria has a history of prolonged military dictatorship motivated by the desire of a few individuals to build a personal empire and enslave the Nigerian people, particularly the people of the Delta region. The military tactics of the present Administration and the brutality being endorsed suggests that Nigeria is under a military dictatorship in civilian outfit.

Nigeria is a major Oil Producing Nation and thus a member of the OPEC. Nigeria has a permanent seat at the UN; a prominent member of the Africa Union (AU) and NEPAD. As a member of ECOWAS, Nigeria plays a prominent role as a Peace Keepers in West Africa. Unfortunately, inside Nigeria, the individuals who constituted/assigned themselves to the position of governance either under a military regime or civilian administration are concerned only about the self-enrichment through the looting of the oil wealth of the people of the Delta region in Nigeria. To secure their looting enterprise, the people of the Niger Delta are held at “gun point” while their oil wealth is being looted and proceeds siphoned to foreign banks and into their personal accounts.

According to a survey published in 2002, Nigeria is the second most corrupt country in the world. Corruption by

those in Nigeria’s corridor of power is born out of the greed to convert the oil wealth of the Delta people to their own personal wealth. Flowing from this criminal conversion of the people’s wealth, is the corruption by some Nigerians as a way of surviving the poverty created by the lack of effective government. **Women Of Africa (Niger Delta of Nigeria) condemn those Nigerians who follow the footsteps of some in political power to loot and stash away peoples wealth.**

The oil richness of the Delta region has been converted to many curses as the people live in perpetual fear through constant military invasion of their lands. Military occupation ordered in the name of the Nigerian government but in fact, ordered by individuals with political power anxious to kill anyone who dares to challenge them in their looting enterprise.

The women of the Niger Delta have many troubles.

In October 1990, the Nigeria Police attacked the people of Umuechem village in the Rivers State who had been having problems with the oil companies over the oil spillages and environmental pollution. The Police attacked the people with K-2 automatic rifles; over fifty people including the Traditional Ruler A.A Ordu were killed. Adejumobi and Abubakar Momoh quoted this tragedy in page 334 of the book “The Political Economy of Nigeria

Under Military Rule". Published by Southern Institute for public studies (SARIPS) (1984-1993).

In 1995, the women of the Niger Delta watched in agony and helplessness as Ogoniland was attacked and occupied by Nigeria's military forces. In the process, Ken Saro Wiwa and his colleagues were imprisoned, tortured, tried in a 'fake court' and executed. The world was outraged, Nigeria's membership of the Commonwealth of Nations was suspended, but the tragedies of the oil richness of the region continue unabated.

The women continue to suffer the effect of military evasion of their land, although to the world Nigeria is a democracy. In a published story, a soldier was caught on camera as he raped a woman in the bush. The Nigerian State is characterized as an irrelevant State because no action was taken against any officer caught abusing the women in this way. The stories are endless.

In 1999, the Federal Government of Nigeria ordered a military attack on Odi in Bayelsa State of the region Odi was destroyed many mothers buried their sons, brothers and fathers while the women of the rest of the region watched helplessly.

Due to international pressue the present Federal Government of Nigeria under the leadership of Chief

Olusegun Obasanjo has in recent times embarked on a 'war' against corruption. It is therefore becoming a little hopeful that with continuing pressure by the international community, Nigeria and the multinational oil companies will begin to address the burden imposed on the women and civil society in the Niger Delta. This is a dream, which depend on the continuing pressure by the international community.

Niger Delta civil society continue to live in fear, poverty, deprivation, degradation, environmental destruction flowing from irresponsible oil exploration, chemical pollution, gas flaring, high infant mortality rate, rape, dehumanization... and the list goes on.

As Nigeria's political power is held by some self acclaimed leadership motivated only by personal wealth a criminal neglect of the people, the women of the Niger Delta will continue to face constant fear of the use of arms and the treat against them and their families.

It is becoming increasingly worrying that as the self-made politicians remain in political power without challenge from civil society the inhumanity of man against man is gaining unimagivable dimension. As the majority of the active population remains unemployed, 'rouge' politicians and community warlords have a standing army of youths who they use to kill, terrorize and keep them in perpetual

domination using the force of arms. This situation will worsen unless the people of the world become aware of the danger that the Nigerian situation poses for world peace.

There are no visible economic activities or means of livelihood, according to some of the women, **“we borrow money to send our children to University, when the children finish, and we then borrow more money to feed them”**. The women continue to engage in their traditional fish and crop farming; however the fish in the rivers have been destroyed by chemical waste dumped in the river by Shell Nigeria, Chevron/Texaco and other oil companies operating in the region.

The Niger Delta region is a ‘Haven’ as the Oil Multinational Companies operate without enforcement of “Standards” against them by Nigeria’s government. Instead, the Oil Companies appears to be manipulating their counterpart in Government to safeguard what they call “production level” Thus, contrary to “Policy” the Oil Industry in the Niger Delta operates with criminal disregard for lives and the people’s environment.

THE NIGERIAN SECURITY FORCES APPEAR TO BE AT WAR WITH THE ARMLESS CITIZENS OF NIGERIA. THIS FACT SHOULD BE KNOWN AND CONDEMNED BY THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY.

It is with great pain in my heart that I remember the women of Delta State who are faced once again with the task of burying their sons killed by Nigerian security forces who have been ordered to invade the area in recent unrest in Delta State. As I speak, women are running to and fro from soldiers and mobile policemen as ordered by Nigeria’s government to protect oil production levels. Knowing the brutal nature of the Forces, I wish to call on the International community to condemn the military government of Nigeria under the disguise of civilian administration for the killing of innocent civilians and the abuse of the women’s rights.

The women of the Niger Delta thank the Women International League for Peace and Justice (WILPF) for solidarity with me on the formation and empowerment of Niger Delta women (Nigeria) to the enthronement of Justice, Peace and Development in the Niger Delta.

We wish to thank WILPF for engaging with Shell International and Shell Nigeria in support of the women’s struggle to attain compensation from Shell Nigeria for the brutality the women suffered at the instance of shell Nigeria on the 8th August 2002 when the women went on a peaceful protest at the gate of Shell Nigeria. It was a peaceful protest until Shell Nigeria called in their military partners the military forces, who then converted a peaceful protest in to a painful experience by the women. The

women are yet to be compensated by Shell despite the intervention of the international Executive Body of Women International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF).

Shell Nigeria continues to maintain that they are not liable for the brutality, mental and physical injuries inflicted on the women by Nigeria's Military Forces on that day. They admitted in a press interview however, that they invited the Military Forces as they attempted to persuade the women to abandon their peaceful protest failed to do so in a peaceful manner. It is true that Shell Nigeria invited Nigeria's military forces to break up the women's peaceful protest but it is not true that they tried peaceful means to persuade the women to abandon their protest. I know this for a fact as I was there and was one of the victims of that brutality against the women of the Niger Delta.

We thank the UK Section of WILPF for sponsoring my attendance at this Conference. We are confident that this opportunity opens for our cause a greater source of support and solidarity. Thank you all for your support in the future.

We thank the international community for their show solidarity on the 2nd July 2005 on the run up to the G8 summit in Scotland as civil society gathered to express the need to reduce poverty in Africa. The wealth of the Niger Delta of Nigeria is sufficient to reduce the level of poverty in Africa given justice, good governance and

respect for the peoples wealth for there can never be 'peace' when there is War and until there is peace, poverty can never be made history.

I am anxious to inform you that although we are currently facing death and continuing abuse of our rights and that of our children, we remain determine to work to install peace to the Delta region through justice and development. We are concerned that although the Nigerian government and the Oil Multinational Companies claim that they take their social responsibility seriously, the opposite is true. We can assure you that the Government of Nigeria and the Oil Industry make claims for Public Relations purposes only to ensure that the world look away while they destroy us and our future generations.

The constant flaring of gas instead of conversion for domestic and industrial use means that the vegetation and environment is damaged. The Oil Companies fail to renew and maintain their oil-bearing pipes and pipelines. This is resulting in oil spillages and pollution of our environment and communities. Oil spillages are a major source of concern and pain to the women as Shell Nigeria refuses to clean up areas and to pay compensation to people for damage caused by their criminal neglect of their pipes and the communities, instead, the Oil Companies shift the 'blame' to the communities who they say sabotage their

operations. This is an unfair accusation and hence an injustice against their host communities.

I remember the struggles of Adaka Boro, Ken Saro Wiwa and the Ogori people. I am troubled by the strategy of using military force against women, children and armless citizens by the Nigerian government that claims to be a civilian administration. A civilian Government should formulate and adopt Policies geared towards maintaining civil rule, respect for human rights, the people's survival, peaceful co-existence, development and conflict resolution by dialogue.

I am concerned that the Nigerian government should expect the people they claim to govern to survive without a means of livelihood, and at the same time keep the peace. The people of the Niger Delta are expected by the Nigerian Government and the Oil Multinational Companies to suffer in silence. Our children are being trained and armed to engage in armed robbery, they are being condemned to Street hawking and highway trading instead of providing for their education.

I remember the women of Odi in Bayelsa State witnessing the mass killing of their sons in 1999. While the rest of the world were deceived that all was well in the Niger Delta.

The Niger Delta and her people continue to suffer untold tragedies as a result of the oil richness of their land while

the Oil Multinational Companies and their counterpart in the guise of Nigeria's political office holders accumulate wealth that they hoard in faraway banks.

I remember the victims of the Jesse; Oviri Court and Ekapkamre petrol fire disasters, which claimed thousands of lives between them, while the rest of the country and the international community watched.

I condemn man's injustice and inhumanity to man and especially to women of the Niger Delta whose wealth is hoarded in foreign banks in a few individual bank accounts. While the women prostitute to feed Nigeria's next generation.

I wish to appeal to the International community to ban the flow of our oil wealth into their various countries banks as a means of supporting our initiative for justice, peace and development of the Delta region of Nigeria. This will impact on the rest of the world.

The women's initiative –

The Niger Delta Women (Nigeria) is an Organisation founded by Women Of Nigeria International, a charity registered and based in the UK. The formation followed the August 8, 2002 military brutalisation of the women's peaceful protest in Warri, Delta State at Shell Nigeria's Gate.

The aim of NDWN is to work in partnership with the Nigerian Government and the Oil Multinational Companies to enthrone justice, peace and development in the region. The women wish to participate in conflict resolution and decision making in matters that concern them and the well being of their children.

We recognise the recognition of the need of women to work in partnership for the management of their country and conflict resolution. (UN Security Resolution 1325) The 1995 Beijing women's Conference also empowers the Niger Delta women to seek to actively participate in the decision making process in Nigeria.

We are aware that the Nigerian government is signatory to International Instruments for the involvement of women in decision-making and conflict resolution. But as observed above, the Nigerian State is characterized as an 'Irrelevant State' as it's activities; the resources, resolutions signed at International Conferences rarely positively effect the majority of the Nigerian people. The self-centred individuals use thus Nigeria's delegation to conferences, membership of International organizations such as the Commonwealth and United Nations as a Public Relations exercise and a means of looting our oil resources.

It is the vision of Women Of Africa (Delta State of Nigeria) to build a grass root based democratic structure through mass mobilization of ordinary women and men.

In order to establish a democratic structure, a hierarchical structure has been formulated with its base in the community and it's Apex at the Regional Council. This concept is in its pilot stage. Once tested, it will be applied to the rest of Nigeria and Africa. Details of the concept are available on demand for support and assistance from the International community. The women are concerned and therefore appeal to the International Community for assistance in the following matters:

- The use of military force by the Nigerian Security Forces against the people of the Niger Delta.
- The military repression of the people by the oil multinationals and Nigeria's military forces.
- The lack of a recognisable Government investment.
- The mass unemployment of graduates and other active population.
- The lack of quality education for the majority.
- Lack of affordable health care.
- Lack of humane housing provision.
- Lack of constant electricity.
- Lack of pipe borne water.
- Lack of means of livelihood.
- Lack of motorable Roads

- Lack of drainage system.
- Lack of sewage and refuse disposal system.
- Lack of food.
- Destruction of our environment by the oil industry.
- The killing of our sons to silence opposition to the criminal acts by government and the oil companies.

The women are concerned about:

- The dumping of chemical waste in our rivers and in our environment.
- The continuous flaring of gas while we lack gas for domestic and industrial use.
- Frequent oil spillages and being blamed for the oil industries criminal neglect of our environment.
- The women are concerned that the Nigerian government and the oil companies use propaganda machinery to deceive the international community while our rights are being abused.

There is a concern from the women that they are being forced into prostitution as a means of feeding themselves and their children. They are disturbed that they are being forced into foreign land where they are made to work to send money home to Nigeria while their wealth is being stacked away in foreign banks by few individuals.

The women are anxious for the support of the International Community to enable them to play a part in the conflict resolution and decision making process.

There are a strong concern about their lack of education and wish to appeal for assistance in the provision of adult education. The women hope to gain employment in a developed Niger Delta to make up for the destruction of their traditional means of livelihood by oil exploration since 1956.

The tragedies of the oil richness of the Niger Delta region of Nigeria are a major challenge to the world and particularly those of us who are concerned for world peace. Justice begets Peace and Peace yields development and human dignity.

Women and Children's rights are Human Rights that must be protected by the human race including the Federal Government of Nigeria. We must all join hands to conquer corruption in Nigeria and the indiscriminate use of military might. Niger Delta women want Justice, Peace and Development. Not, the destruction of life and means of livelihood at gun point.

Please support our effort and thank you for your interest.

Alice Ukoko

Chief Executive Officer: Women Of Africa (WOA)