

United Nations Second Session of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues.  
Agenda Item 4a-Economic and Social Development.  
Wednesday, 14 May, 2003.  
Mr. Chairman,

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Thank you for giving me the opportunity to address this august assembly. I am Legborsi SARO Pyagbara representing the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP).

Last year, I made a passionate appeal to this forum to come over to Ogoni to loose us from the grip of economic asphyxiation that we are passing through in Nigeria from the unjust exploitation of the our oil resources which has turned our environment into an economic wasteland. That appeal was not in any way heeded, and I am afraid if this is going to be the posture of the forum in the coming years.

Mr. Chair, since that was made, the situation of the Ogoni People has gone from bad to worse. From about 70% youth unemployment level two years ago, it has today increased to 85% youth unemployment level. From a GNP per capita of USD 1250 in 1960, today, the GNP is USD 250.

Ogoni today has over 100 oil wells in eight oil fields, one petrochemical complex, two refineries, a fertilizer complex, an ocean terminal and an Export Processing zone. In terms of trade and liberalization, Ogoni with an export free zone, manufacturing and extractive industries could be classified as one of the areas with the freest trade.

However, in spite of the presence of all the economic development projects on our land, we remain a non-player on the scene of any of these companies. None of these companies employ Ogoni people into any serious positions. These companies are rather agents of death of the Ogoni people.

The most pitiable and appalling situation at the moment, which demands your urgent attention is the on-going unjust dismissal of Ogoni employees in the services of the government and companies in the country without any recourse to due process .As at the last count, fifty three had been dismissed by last month.

Furthermore, in 1999, the Nigeria government set up the Human Rights Violations Investigation Panel mandated to look in cases of human rights abuses in the country since independence. Of the 10,000 petitions received by the panel, 8000 petitions came from Ogoni, which gives a picture of the horrendous abuses of the rights of the Ogoni people which occurred under the military and still continues till date. During a meeting of the panel with the Rivers State government, it was resolved that the government reabsorbs all Ogoni person who were sacked from the services of the state government on account of their membership of MOSOP in the period 1993-1999. Sir, I compiled a list of about 300 Ogoni workers who was affected and submitted to the State government. Till this moment nothing had been done with the socio-economic implications of this on the affected persons and their families.

Mr. Chairman, a flashpoint of potential conflict soon to come is the attempt by the government and Shell P.D.C. to return to their production activities in Ogoni ten years after they were forced to leave the area in 1993. This attempt is being made without any negotiation with the Ogoni as has been constantly demanded, and we see more days of blood bath ahead as we are going to resist this return with the last drop of our blood.

Debt Servicing/Cancellation.

There is not going to be any other better commitment to the welfare and well-being of the Indigenous peoples in poor countries of the world without the World bank and IMF giving a human face to the debt issue and not from the profit perspective. Nigeria has an external debt burden of about USD 30 billion. The IMF and the World Bank keen on repayment has recommended and is encouraging the intensified exploitation of oil and gas, which constitutes over 90% of Nigeria's GDP. None of these debts was incurred on any project in Ogoni or remotely beneficial to Ogoni. Encouraging more exploitation of oil and gas means World Bank and IMF promoting more deaths of the indigenous Ogoni People and others in the Niger Delta of Nigeria. As more exploitation of oil and gas is the more degradation of the environment, the basis of our economic and social well-being.

The World bank and others continue to argue that they would not be in Nigeria, if the country had not gone on a borrowing spree. But the question, which confronts us all, is what to do in the present circumstances for the sake of Indigenous peoples in these poor countries. Must we all see our children die of kwashiorkor? Must we see all those who survive the ravages of diseases and famine grow up as zombie because they cannot afford good education and decent homes because of world bank conditional ties on debt repayment which creates much problems for Indigenous peoples, who incidentally bear the burden of having these resources in their belly?

Recommendation

1. Call on members of the Permanent Forum to urgently engage the Nigeria government and Shell on the Ogoni Situation.
2. Call on the World Bank and the IMF to cancel all debts on Nigeria and other African countries.

Thank you

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