



**The United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues  
Item 5 of the provisional agenda-General Statement  
Tuesday, 21 May, 2002**

**Mr. Chairman,**

I thank you once more for giving me the opportunity to address this historic assembly. I am Legborsi Saro Pyagbara representing the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP).

Mr. Chair, just as the Macedonians, according to biblical history called on the Apostle Paul to come over to Macedonia and help them, I and my colleagues, this day invite you, members of the permanent forum and indeed my indigenous brothers and sisters to come over to Ogoni and help us.

Denied control over our land, its resources and environment through a dubious Land Use Act promulgated in 1978 by the government, refused participation in the conception and design of development programmes that affect us, poisoned by the reckless and unaccountable exploitation of petroleum on our land owing to corporate irresponsibility by Shell, asphyxiated by the tripod political arrangement in the country which ensured our political marginalization, economically dis-empowered through the twin evils of environmental degradation and political exclusion, educationally decimated through the instruments of poverty and unfavorable policy of the government, and culturally de-linked through the loss of our language and other cultural heritages - all resulting in physical and psychological ill-health, Ogoni today trudges on the brink of disaster as it has got all that oppression and marginalization has got to offer.

Our greatest worry at this moment is the seeming confusing signal which the return to civil rule in Nigeria has sent to the international community. Most members of the international community tend to believe the government propaganda that all is going well with the country which is patently false.

The situation as it is today is what most members of the civil society call a civilianized military as the government is yet to do away with the crisis-response mechanism it inherited from past military governments and corruption still walks on its four legs across the dying land. Besides, the constitution which ushered in the present administration does not give any attention to Minority and Indigenous Peoples rights nor does it have any serious environmental justice programme to rejuvenate the devastated Niger Delta ecosystem. The very fires that led to the Ogoni campaign is still flaring across the Niger Delta.

My dear fellow brothers of the permanent forum, while I appreciate the fact that you cannot within the limits of available resources at your disposal address all the nagging problems of Indigenous Peoples especially the case of self-determination which has been bolstered again with the Independence of East Timor during the last weekend, I hasten to add that there are other challenges which you can urgently direct your energies into. These challenges include issues of education, poverty reduction, corporate accountability and good health.

In the light of the foregoing, we make the following recommendations,

1. The permanent forum should in partnership with United Nations agencies and other related bodies design appropriate means of engaging the latter in making education available to the indigenous children at all levels especially now that most countries are privatising education which most indigenous populations cannot afford.
2. Poverty: We are beginning to discover that poverty is caused by unjust structures that leave resources and power in the hands of a few. Such is the present fad called economic globalization. We have had its pre-cursors before now which were the globalization of colonization and imperialism, and the second which was globalization of ideologies which put us on the laps of cold war between communists and capitalist ideologies. In all these, indigenous peoples have always been at the receiving end of untold poverty. The third and current wave is economic globalization. The permanent forum should seek ways of engaging governments not to accept all the pills prescribed by the apostles of economic globalization.
3. The permanent forum should also design means of economically empowering Indigenous Peoples through job creation procedures that draw upon the strength of traditional livelihoods.
4. The permanent forum should be in the vanguard of those promoting the ratification and adoption of the Draft Fundamental Human Rights Principles for Business Enterprise being prepared by the Sub-Commission on Promotion and Protection of Human Rights. The adoption of this principle will help to curtail the excesses of multinational corporations that are not corporately accountable in their businesses.
5. The Permanent Forum should embark on massive sensitization campaigns about indigenous issues in all the regions of the world through workshops and seminars with governments and indigenous peoples.
6. The Permanent forum should establish outposts in all the countries of the world where there exists Indigenous Peoples. This will help to breach the gap between the people and the forum. Volunteers are ready for this arrangement.
7. The permanent forum should always set up an assessment team that would rise to independently assess the abuse of the rights of indigenous peoples in the different countries of the world.
8. Finally I would call on the forum to help the Ogoni people in seeking the support of the United Nations in implementing the recommendations of the United Nations Fact-finding team to Nigeria in 1996 especially the recommendation which called on the federal government of Nigeria and Shell Petroleum Development Company to conduct an environmental audit of the Ogoni environment and the Niger Delta.

Mr. Chairman, this statement is a call to action and we look forward to seeing the Permanent Forum waking up to its responsibilities early in the day. We are prepared to give them the necessary support they deserve.

Thank you.