



PERMANENT MISSION OF NIGERIA TO THE UNITED NATIONS

828 SECOND AVENUE • NEW YORK, N.Y. 10017 • TEL. (212) 953-9130 • FAX (212) 697-1970

---

**STATEMENT OF INTERVENTION TO THE PERMANENT  
FORUM ON INDIGENOUS ISSUES**

doCip  
ARCHIVES

**DELIVERED BY: GEORGES OMOKHAGBOR ALABI  
MINISTER**

**PERMANENT MISSION OF NIGERIA TO THE UNITED NATIONS,  
NEW YORK**

**20<sup>TH</sup> MAY, 2003**

**HUMAN RIGHTS QUESTIONS:**  
**PROMOTING MINORITY AND TRIBAL RIGHTS**  
**IN THE CONTEXT OF PROMOTION OF HUMAN RIGHTS**  
**IN A DEMOCRATIC NIGERIA**

**Mr. Chairman,**

My delegation wishes to congratulate this distinguished Forum of Indigenous People in its current Session for 2003. We further congratulate the Forum on the theme of "Indigenous Children and Youth" a subject that is aptly chosen for its relevance to this occasion.

**The Theme** is timely and suitable for raising awakening and the consciousness of governments towards the promotion and protection of the rights of Indigenous Children, particularly the girl child and youth. This would entail the promotion of women empowerment through sustained education, vocational training for capacity-building and enhance their participation in the process of social progress and economic growth at all levels of the society. Hence, my delegation supports the lofty objectives and purpose of the Forum and the views earlier expressed by prominent speakers like Ms. Angela King, Mr. Radolfo Stevenhagen and Nils Kasberg among others, who spoke on the solutions to the myriads of problems confronting indigenous and ethnic minorities in their various countries. We are convinced that with total commitment and concerted efforts of all well-meaning people, States and the United Nations, the Indigenous Forum will despite formidable challenges in the area of globalization, and given the necessary atmosphere of peace cooperation, tolerance and accommodation, will attain great success in its aims and activities in the years ahead. We therefore assure that the Nigerian government will be a reliable partner of the Forum in this commitment.

**Mr. Chairman,**

However, my delegation would like to make some clarifications on current realities of socio-economic growth and political development in Nigeria – particularly as they impact on the rights of minority groups, since the inception of our nascent democracy in May 1999. Let me clearly assert that Nigeria is predominantly an indigenous society and still largely retains the basic characteristics of being indigenous; while at the same time, striving for sustainable development and the dividends of democracy and good governance for all its people without discrimination as to ethno-tribal origin, religion, sex and thereby guarantying human rights and good welfare for all within a United Country.

For the benefit of those who may not be aware, major democratic elections have just been concluded in Nigeria. The implication of this event is that democracy with all its attendant socio-economic and development prospects, including human rights, is a reality for all. With democratic governance, all hands are expected to be on deck to achieve lasting security, peace and stability at all levels of our national existence. Therefore, today, in a democratic Nigeria governments at all levels are committed to the process of social integration, and mobilization of all Nigerians for active participation in the on-going process of national development and re-construction. To this end, the initiative of promoting the spirit of reconciliation and forgiveness among all Nigerians began by President Obasanjo, as a central element in addressing all feelings and pains, arising from past injustices, deprivations and human rights violations remains an on-going process. This has been useful in redressing many cases of human rights abuses – including those suffered by minority groups like the Ogoni People. Efforts are currently being made to promote good governance in a transparent and accountable and responsible manner to confront the myriads of environmental, ecological and other forms of pollution caused by oil exploration in the six oil producing States of the Niger-Delta region of the country.

**Mr. Chairman,**

Specifically, in the area of policy, the government of Nigeria has embarked on meaningful dialogue with the major companies involved in oil exploration. The purpose is to ensure concrete improvement in the quality of the environment – land, water, air and so on, and promote the quality of lives of all people in the area. In addition to existing national legislations enacted on environmental degradation from oil production activities, more legislations are being evolved by the National Assembly to address the concerns of the Niger-Delta People and to terminate gas flaring activities, in by the year 2005.

To further demonstration its commitment to the good welfare of the people in the affected States, the Nigerian government accords priority to other useful approaches. For example, a Ministry of Environment is created to facilitate all environmental problems and concerns, with focus on promoting sustainable rural development and improved livelihood. Also, a Commission, the Niger-Delta Commission (NDDC) was created for the purpose of functionally developing basic infrastructures like roads and electricity and bringing social services like health, education and vocational training to the populace.

However, it is pertinent to state that all Nigerians, regardless of ethnic or religious background, are to embrace the spirit of cooperation, tolerance and accommodation necessary to promote meaningful efforts and complement the

good policies and actions of government to sustain collective national existence and promote the corporate unity of a secular, multi-ethnic and multi-religious Nigeria. This is a non-negotiable condition.

**Mr. Chairman,**

On the debt problem, my delegation would like to state that it is not a deliberate creation of any ethnic groups in Nigeria, not least the Ogoni People. In fact, the Nigerian people shoulder the debt burden with adverse consequences on their collective welfare. However, this problem is not peculiar to Nigeria as it is a common factor to most developing countries, particularly those of Africa. Thus, looked at in proper perspectives, it is an obligation we cannot decline as a responsible member State of the global community. This is despite the exploitative terms of debt repayment which continue to gulp over 40% of Nigeria's annual budget and resulting in hardship to the majority of our people. This is why the government of Nigeria remains resolute in its advocacy of debt cancellation, reduction and, or debt relief to resolving the debt issue.

Finally, we must add that in order to reach our destination and achieve goals, we must eschew violence as an option, and embrace dialogue and other peaceful methods to finding appropriate solutions to all problems. We believe that the necessity to promote peaceful resolution of issues and agitations, would enhance the attainment of rapid socio-economic development. No doubt that this approach, constitutes an integral part of the laudable aims and objectives of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous issues now and in the future. We must therefore be determined in our concerted efforts to promote the overriding purpose of the Forum for the benefits of all our peoples.

**I thank you Mr. Chairman.**