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AGENDA ITEM 4- HALF-DAY DISCUSSION ON THE AFRICAN REGION

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Mr. Chairperson,

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to address this august assembly. I am **Legborsi Saro Pyagbara** from the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP). My organization join other earlier speakers at this forum in congratulating you on your election as the new Chairperson of this body.

Mr. Chair, several challenges face us as indigenous peoples from Africa. Whilst acknowledging that improvements have been recorded in some countries in relation to Indigenous peoples, much work still needs to be done in improving the lot of Indigenous peoples on the continent. Africa continues to lag behind many socio-economic indicators such as health, education, income and culture. The recent report on the *State of the World Mothers 2013* released by Save the Children<sup>1</sup> indicated that Africa remains the worst places for babies to be born. The report stated that having a baby in Sub-Saharan Africa is riskier than anywhere else in the world. In terms of education, the UNESCO had noted that sub-Saharan Africa also have the highest number of out-school children<sup>2</sup> per country. In related development, Africa, the birthplace of 30 percent of the world's tongues, a critical component of our cultural heritage, are losing most of their languages owing to national policies of assimilation and integration. The situation of Africa Indigenous peoples in all these statistics is better imagined. We are either invisible or lost.

The African Environment Outlook-3 (AEO-3)<sup>3</sup>, commissioned by the African Ministerial Conference on the Environment (AMCEN), and released this year had place special focus on links between environment and health, pointing to the statistics that environmental risks contribute 28 per cent of Africa's disease burden. Diarrhea, respiratory infections and malaria account for 60 per cent of known environmental health impacts in Africa.

The report had highlighted the environment related health impacts of the oil extractive industry in Ogoniland with its exposure of our communities to petroleum waste.

The report reiterated the findings of an earlier report by UNEP in 2011 on its assessment of the Ogoni environment<sup>4</sup> which concluded that the Ogoni community had been exposed

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.savethechildrenweb.org/SOWM-2013/files/assets/basic-html/index.html#page7>

<sup>2</sup> [www.uis.unesco.org/factsheets/documents/fs-18-OOSC-2.pdf](http://www.uis.unesco.org/factsheets/documents/fs-18-OOSC-2.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> [www.unep.org/pdf/aeo3.pdf](http://www.unep.org/pdf/aeo3.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> [www.unep.org/EnvironmentalAssessmentofOgonilandreport](http://www.unep.org/EnvironmentalAssessmentofOgonilandreport)

to petroleum hydrocarbons in outdoor air and drinking water, sometimes at elevated concentrations and stressed that community members at Nsisioken Ogale in Ogoni are drinking water from wells that are contaminated with benzene, a known carcinogen, at levels over 900 times above WHO limits.

With an expanding population and commensurate expanding growth in investment particularly in the extractive sector, the foregoing point on the environment related health impacts of natural resource extraction on the continent merits our deepest attention. This is because most of the extractive investments are taking place in Indigenous peoples' territories on the continent with its negative impacts.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Mr. Chairperson, in recognition of the above, we make the following recommendations

1. We call on the Nigeria government to carry out the full implementation of the UNEP Report on the Environmental Assessment of Ogoniland.
2. We call on African governments to give legal and constitutional recognition to Indigenous peoples in their respective states.
3. We call on African governments to invest more in education and health particularly for Indigenous peoples.
4. We call for a programme of Indigenous language revitalization to be established and supported by our respective governments.
5. On issues of investments, we request that the Principle of Free, Prior and Informed Consent should be the overarching guide for all investments in our territories
6. We request a comprehensive programme of capacity building to deal with the growing effects of climate change; inadequate water, sanitation and hygiene in Africa.
7. As part of proposals for the future work of the Forum, we are proposing a Half-Day Discussion during the 2014 session of the Forum on Business, Human Rights and Indigenous Peoples.

Thank you for listening

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