



United Nations Economic and Social Council
Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues
Third session
New York, 10-21 May 20, 2004
Statement by Mrs. Adekunbi A. Sonaike,
Minister Counsellor
Permanent Mission of Federal republic of Nigeria to the United
Nations

Mr. Chairman,

Allow me first of all to congratulate you and the other members of the Forum, and to express our appreciation for the able manner with which you have steered the affairs of the Forum. Also permit me to briefly share with you some background information about Nigeria, especially in relation to the Ogonis and the Niger Delta region.

Mr. Chairman,

Nigeria is a multi-ethnic country with about 371 ethnic groups. The Niger Delta region, which accounts for Nigeria's oil resources, comprises nine states. These are Abia, Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross River, Delta, Edo, Imo, Ondo and Rivers. Ogoniland is situated in Rivers State, which has eight ethnic groups, of which the Ogonis,

with well over half a million people, are a significant component. The Ogonis are not a minority tribe in Rivers State, although nationally, they fit the description. Ogoniland accounts for about 4% of Nigeria's oil production, and Shell is the main oil prospecting company in Ogoni territory. Over the years, development of the Niger Delta region has been a problem because of the unique terrain. It is one of the largest wetlands in the world. Prior to 1999, various attempts to develop the region failed for a combination of reasons, including a lack of commitment on the part of government and the oil companies on the one hand, and local circumstances on the other. However, on assumption of office in 1999, President Obasanjo made the development of the Niger Delta region one of the cardinal points of his administration. Consequently, he established the Niger Delta Development Commission, with the sole aim of implementing a programme for the sustainable development of the region.

Mr. Chairman,

Since its establishment, the Commission has undertaken the construction of 40 roads, 90 water projects, 120 electrification projects and 47 shore protection/jetty projects. On the human development side, the agency has treated over 100,000 persons for various illnesses; enrolled over 5,000 in computer training classes, built over 205 blocks of classrooms and provided science laboratory equipment. As a way of compensating the oil producing communities, the Federal Government increased revenue allocation to oil producing states from 3% to 13%. On its part, Shell has increased its human and infrastructural development of the region, especially in Ogoniland. This, in spite of the company's forced withdrawal from Ogoniland since January 1993 when elements of MOSOP repeatedly threatened oil workers and disrupted production.

Mr. Chairman,

The Federal Government of Nigeria recognizes its obligations as a Member State of the United Nations as well as its commitments to the African Charter, but no responsible government will fold its arms and watch a group take the law into their hands and unleash mayhem on the population and disrupt Government's efforts to provide necessary infrastructure to improve the living conditions of its citizens.

I Thank you