

Item 4 : ONGOING PRIORITIES AND THEMES.

At the United Nations Headquarters, New York, Monday May 23, 2005.

Statement by Adewale Adesoye, the *Green Peoples Environmental Network, GREPNET* (Nigeria, West Africa) to the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues on Human Rights with Special emphasis on an interactive dialogue with the Special Rapporteur of the Commission on Human Rights, on the situation of human rights and fundamental freedoms of indigenous people.

Madam Chairperson,

On behalf of indigenous communities and peoples in my country, I congratulate you on your new appointment, wish you the strength to cope with the enormous challenges and express great satisfaction with the wisdom with which you have handled deliberations since your appointment.

This statement is on behalf of the indigenous peoples in the world's most populous black nation of 120million people, meaning that one out of every six African is a Nigerian. because the situation in Nigeria is usually of far reaching consequences to the whole of Africa. The indigenous communities in my country are home to the richest natural resources in the world; their homeland being a repository of the 6th largest oil deposit in the world, and the second largest deposit of Bitumen in the world. This resources endowed by the creator, has been a source of state sponsored repression, wanton destruction of lives and property of indigenous communities, murder of women and children and the blatant disregard for universal principles of human rights, without which live in the human community, would be short, brutish and nasty.

The problems of human rights violations in my country are of concern to every conscientious human being, either you are indigenous or not. Madam chairperson, I thank you for permitting me to say that, this year, 2005 is of bitter significance to indigenous communities in my country, for, November this year will mark a decade of the gruesome hanging of a great indigenous right crusader, Kenule Saro Wiwa by Nigerian authorities, who, up till now, have not released the mangled remains of his gentle, cool and innocent corpse alongside that of eight Ogoni indigenous community leaders.

During the trial of Saro Wiwa, the Ogoni people sought justice, but were denied, , and now the humble demand that his body be released for customary burial has again been ignored. The vicious hatred for the dead, only showcases the contempt for the living, and in fact, demonstrates, in naked form, the colour of freedom in my home country, Nigeria today.

Madam Chairperson, the opportunity may hardly arise so soon again, to inform this gathering of beautiful people, that the human rights situation in Nigeria, is like the proverbial leopard, that never changes its true colours.

Nothing fundamental has changed in my country for the freedom of indigenous people, except that the attires of the former military leaders that oppressed the people, have been changed from military to civilian clothing, but the actors remain the same, as far as the indigenous peoples of Nigeria are concerned. The human rights violations of indigenous communities are institutionalized, backed by laws and a national constitution framed and written to serve the ends of our oppressors. Why the people recognize themselves as indigenous, and do not think the recognition of whom they are must derive legitimacy from the recognition of their tormentors, the Nigerian laws remains contemptuous of indigenous communities, derogates their being and essence. Many laws like the Land Use Decree of 1978 and the Petroleum Act were made to keep indigenous peoples in

perpetual solitude and melancholy. The national parliament is the parliament of the tormentors. The indigenous peoples are minorities in such, and most of their elected leaders must be protégé of the oppressive ideology. Today, the indigenous communities are under siege with the militarization of the oil producing communities.

This has led to the shooting and murder of innocent people, and the Airforce raid of defenseless communities. In March this year, Odioma, an Ijaw Indigenous Community was bombed by the Airforce. Children, women and infants were killed. It was a repeat of the November 1999 bombing of Odi, another Ijaw community by the civilian regime, five months after the civilian regime came to power. Over 200 innocent people were killed, burnt to death or shot. There was a repeat in Zaki Biam, when over 100 people were killed in a military raid. This space is too small to contain the various cases of the shooting of innocent protesters, calling for environmental justice. Whereas, the pollution of the sea and the numerous streams from which the communities derive spiritual power and a touch of healing, the pouching of the indigenous forest in search of parrots, Iroko, Mahogany, Obeche tree species and rare animal species, the rampant logging have left the people's heritage in pieces.

I wish to echo, from the deepest valley of nothingness and the cries of hopeless, poor children and women of indigenous communities, the call for the demilitarization of the indigenous Niger-Delta oil producing communities.

. That the Nigerian Government should ensure genuine participation of indigenous communities in the constitutional making process and that the right to self determination be recognized by the Nigerian authorities.

. That the indigenous communities should be consulted in the execution of external projects, which threaten their eco-system, like the 500million dollar West African Pipeline project, which is backed by the world bank.

. That the European Union, EU must ensure respect for human rights in the granting of millions of dollars aid to the Nigerian Census project, because the Nigerian government has said that there would be no column indicating the ancestral ethnic origin of participants. For us, such a project is mental genocide, because the indigenous people want to know their actual population.

. That the Indigenous Forum should encourage UNESCO to assist some poor indigenous communities, who, even in the 21st century has no alphabet, not to talk of learning and developing their ancestral languages.

Madam Chairman I conclude this piece by the song of one of the indigenous communities in Nigeria.

We are poor; but wise.

We are defenseless; but strong.

We are angry, hungry; yet are proud.

Our heads are bloodied, but our heads are not bowed.

Freedom is like the wind, when it comes, no one, not even the military tanks can stop it.

I thank you for your patience, madam chairperson.