Nigeria: Shell's choice between profits and principles

Shell is continuing its clever misleading propaganda orchestrated through advertisements circulating in the most influencial press media of the North, in order to revamp its tarnished image and convince public opinion that it is an environmentally friendly company. The campaign "Profits and Principles: Is there a choice?" is based on beautiful photographs of wild animals, lush forests, and tender faces of African people accompanied by texts like: "Time and again at Shell we're discovering the rewards of respecting the environment when doing business". "If we're exploring for oil and gas reserves in environmental sensitive regions, we consult widely with the different local and global interest groups to ensure than biodiversity in each location is preserved." "At Shell we are committed to support fundamental human rights. We invest in the communities around us to create new opportunities and growths."

Nevertheless in the Niger Delta reality could not be more far away from the self image the company is making efforts to show. Since 1958, when Shell arrived to the region a nightmare began for the Ogoni, an indigenous nation of about 500,000 people living in the area. Counting on the support of successive governments Shell took hold of Ogoniland. As in other parts of the world where oil is exploited, the result has been high unemployment and poverty rates, environmental devastation and loss of livelihoods for the local people. Repression has been brutal. About 80,000 people had their villages destroyed and about 2,000 were killed by the state armed corps. Last November 10th marked the 5th anniversary of the murder of the environmental leaders Ken Saro Wiwa, Barinem Kiobel, John Kpuinen, Saturday Dorbee, Paul Levura, Nordu Eawo, Felix Nuate, Daniel Gboko and Baribor Bera. Their "crime" was to fight for the rights of their people against abuses commited by Shell and the Nigerian military government that was backing it.

In 1993 the Ogoni declared Shell "persona non grata" and got it out of their lands. But after an absence of seven years the company is menacing to return to Ogoniland. In April this year the announcement was made that the only aim of Shell was to remove its remaining facilities, which were causing environmental problems in the area due to the emission of poisonous gases and uncontrolled leaking. Nonetheless in October Shell admitted that its real intentions were to reactivate its 125 oil wells in the region. If this happens violence, collusion and misery will increase. It is clear that Shell has got an answer to the question of whether there is a choice between profits and principles. The answer is yes and the choice is profits.

Article based on information from: "Some things never change" by Andy Rowell and Owens Wiwa, The Guardian, 8/11/2000; "Greenwash Award: Shell. Clouding the Issue" by Kenny Bruno, 15/11/2000; MOSOP Ogoni, 17/11/2000,

(The full text of the memorial message from Ms. Gbenewa Phido, President of MOSOP-UK on 11/11/2000 to mark the 5th memorial anniversary of the murder of Ken Saro Wiwa and other Ogoni leaders, has been included in our web site under: By country/Nigeria. Previous articles published in our Bulletin about the struggle of the peoples of the Niger Delta are available in the same site)