
Nigeria: At whose expense is oil drilled in the Niger Delta?

Indigenous peoples of the oil-rich Niger Delta region continue to suffer environmental degradation, poverty and violence to the hands of oil companies that operate in the area. The companies themselves, together with the Nigerian and Northern country governments are responsible for the present state of things.

Shell, that holds a sad record during its long history in the Niger Delta, has set aside a total of \$1billion to develop its offshore oil and gas field in the region. This project is being financed by a funding agreement between oil companies in Nigeria and the Nigerian Petroleum Corporation. Since oil accounts for 90% of Nigeria's foreign earnings, the Nigerian Government is interested in increasing the country's crude oil production at all cost. At the same time, the state is in charge of the "security" of the area. This does not mean defending the right of local communities to live in peace in a healthy environment but, on the contrary, defending oil companies' interests to the detriment of the Niger Delta population. The Nigerian government is not alone in this task. The Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP-UK) has recently denounced that the US government has granted military aid consisting of eight fast attack vessels to the Nigerian Navy, in order to patrol the region.

At whose expense is oil drilled in the Niger Delta? MOSOP-UK denounces that "the Niger Delta people are the ones who are bearing the brunt of the opportunity cost of oil exploration in Nigeria. The weight of this cost is increasingly proving too high to bear on the people". Paradoxically, the Niger Delta means enormous earnings for a few and at the same time poverty and sufferance for the vast majority. "While our children suffer malnutrition from starvation in a land of plenty; our husbands, fathers and brothers are being killed for protesting the injustice met on our land; our women raped by oil company contractors and security agents; our environment destroyed with no hope for our future generations" says MOSOP-UK's President Ms. Gbenewa Phido.

She adds: "It is time the environment of Niger Delta people is protected. It is time the continuous harassment and intimidation of Niger Delta people by oil companies and the Nigerian Security agents is stopped. It is time Niger Delta people are appreciated and respected as a people with rights and not treated as hooligans and troublemakers as has been portrayed in the recent past. It is time Niger Delta people stood up and remain standing until their rights are restored."

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