Nigeria: the struggle continues

Four years have passed since the judicial murder of Ken Saro Wiwa together with other eight human rights activists to the hands of the Nigerian military dictatorship on November 10th 1995, that generated condemnation and outrage worldwide. Nevertheless -and in spite of the political changes that occured in the country- environmental destruction and human rights abuses associated to oil exploration and extraction in the Niger Delta region continues. A delegation of US social and environmental organizations' representatives who visited that region during this month reported that the irresponsibility of the multinational oil companies operating in the area -e.g. Shell and Chevron- in relation to environmental and social issues are threatening to the survival of local people and the fragile political stability of the country. The Nigerian government has not yet met the demands in the Ogoni Bill of Rights which would guarantee them their existence in their traditional territories. Additionally, the authorities continue to work in favour of oil companies and against their own people by not implementing the independent environmental impact assessment on Ogoniland as recommended by the UN. Environmental degradation and poverty are not only affecting the Ogoni, but also other people of the Niger Delta, such as the Ijaw, the Itsekiri, and the Urhobos.

"We the Ogonis have been cheated in the past 41 years of our fair share of revenue from oil exploration and extraction in our land by Shell with assistance from the governments of Nigeria. We need not restate the fact that in a land so richly blessed by nature, we have been met with poverty and injustice. Our people have nothing to show for their sacrifices and for a long time, this giant multinational corporation has continued to humiliate our existence. Shell has wasted our environment with oil exploration and in return repaid us with a degraded and polluted land, poisoned air and streams" reads a statement by MOSOP-UK (Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People) dated September 10th. The Ogoni people reject the so called "Development Project Programme" that the company has proposed for their territory and have declared Shell "persona non grata" in Ogoniland. "Lord take my soul, but the struggle continues" said Ken Saro Wiwa before being executed. His last message keeps its significance and vigour in these difficult times.

Sources: MOSOP Ogoni, 10/9/99, 20/9/99, Ijaw National Congress USA (INCUSA), 20/9/99,