

AN ADDRESS PRESENTED BY THE NATIONAL PRESIDENT, NIGER- DELTA WOMEN'S MOVEMENT FOR PEACE AND DEVELOPMENT (NDWPD) Ms. CAROLINE USIKPEDO-OMONIYE, MCIA AT THE UN Women's event - Leaders' Forum on the Future Women Want: Shaping the Future International Development Framework, 19th June, 2012 at Rio De Janeiro, Brazil.

We send the greetings of the **Niger Delta Women's movement for Peace and Development** to you and thank you for giving us opportunity for being part of this special event.

INTRODUCTION

I am Caroline Usikpedo-Omoniye the Founder / National President of the Niger Delta Women's movement for Peace and Development, I was a victim of circumstances, I had fought for my rights with my employer through the office of the public defender to get Justice in 2005, I see women's rights being violated on a daily basis, and no one to help, and coupled with my vision for women empowerment in Nigeria using women development and training as a tool, I called on women of the Niger Delta to join hands in the pursuit of the Emancipation of women in the region.

THE NIGER DELTA, NIGERIA

The Niger Delta is located in the Atlantic Coast of southern Nigeria and it has been described as the largest wetland in Africa. The region is highly susceptible to adverse environmental changes occasioned by climate change because it is located in the coastal region of the world.

IMPACT OF OIL IN THE NIGER DELTA, NIGERIA

The impacts of Oil operations in the Niger Delta are cumulative and have acted synergistically with other environmental stresses to impair ecosystems and severely compromise human livelihoods and health.

When Shell struck commercial oil at Oloibiri in 1956, Niger Delta communities rejoiced.

The celebration was crowned with a novelty football match between a Shell team and an Oloibiri team. The Oloibiri team won, but that was the last time any team defeated Shell in Nigeria once the game shifted from the football field to the business battlefield.

Oil as a natural endowment in the Niger-Delta Region of Nigeria with its exploration and exploitation was expected to be an abundant blessing to the Niger Delta Region. Unfortunately and regrettably too, oil has turned out to be a curse .

The Niger Delta Region, which is the epicenter of oil exploitation and exploration, has suffered monumental maltreatment through political/economic marginalization, violence and environmental degradation.

The standard response of the government to crush community protests in the Niger Delta has been the militarization of the area.

The human cost of conflicts are high and are borne principally by the "civilian" population especially women and children who are frequently viewed as targets by warring parties and criminal gangs.

Women in the Niger Delta have been victims of gender based discriminatory practices and the economic crisis. They are underrepresented in the strategic heights of politics, government, economic, educational institutions and employed labor particularly in the oil industry.

It is an indisputable fact that the Nigerian society still regards women as inferior to men. In the rural areas even to this day women are only supposed to be seen and not heard.

The inheritance laws favour the men as against women who are subjected to inhuman widowhood practices and other cultural bias.

The rural women work tirelessly from morning till late in the evening. They are either working in their farms or doing petty trading in the markets in the bid to make ends meet in their families

THE NIGER DELTA WOMEN TRIBUNAL

Why the Tribunal?

Within the framework of the Millennium Development Goals, policies and innovations to enhance adaptation to climate change cannot be viewed in isolation from current development priorities:

Using the model of the Feminist Task Force GCAP women's tribunals, In 2009 , we organized two Tribunals and **PUBLIC HEARING ON WOMEN, WATER, POVERTY AND CLIMATE CHANGE NIGER DELTA, NIGERIA** focusing on **Sustainable Adaptation: Women, climate change and poverty reduction** (Odi and Jesse) which feed into the final results presented at the Klima Forum 2009 in Copenhagen and in Durban respectively.

An average of one oil spill occurs every week, and in the delicate ecosystem of the Niger Delta, these oil related accidents cause's grave damages to the environment and all that it harbors. Protected by the might of the government, the oil companies accused the impoverished victims of being the cause of their tragedy.

In odi lack of potable water and pollution of River Nun, which is the only source of water in Odi town, has adversely effected the living standard of women and children as well as the exacerbated poverty, ill health, wealth creation and infant mortality. Five women witnesses testified to these prevailing deplorable conditions.

The cases presented at the Various Tribunals relates to the adverse impact of Global climate change and the peculiar cases of environmental pollution on the rural women of Odi in Bayelsa State and Jesse in Delta State Nigeria.

The struggle to cope and adapt to climate change and the delicate balance between sustainability and equity were the themes analyzed during the women tribunals.

Responsibilities

The oil multinational operating in the Niger-Delta region as well as the federal government of Nigeria contributed in no small measure to the deplorable poverty situation and the area effect of climate change in the Niger-Delta communities.

Recommendations of the Women's Tribunal

It was therefore recommended that concerted efforts should be made by both the federal government of Nigeria and the multinational oil companies operating in Odi, Jesse and the entire oil Niger-Delta region to provide potable water in Odi, clean up the environment continually polluted by the diverse and devious oil exploration and exploration activities by these multinational .

Finally, The Niger Delta has been blessed with an abundance of physical and human resources, as well as a well developed industrial base.

However, the region' s tremendous potentials for economic growth and sustainable development remains unfulfilled and its future is threatened by deteriorating economic conditions that are not being address by present policies and actions.

Let me conclude by saying that poverty and economic hardship is real in these community of the Niger Delta and the hardest hits is the women and children, and immediate steps ought to be taken to address the issues of climate change and oil pollution that has exacerbated these phenomenon.