

**THE MULTINATIONAL PANEL (BSOEC) REPORT ON ENVIRONMENTAL GENOCIDE  
AND THE HUMAN COST OF BIG OIL IN BAYELSA STATE OF NIGERIA:**

**JOINT PRESS CONFERENCE TO DEMAND IMPLEMENTATION BY THE GOVERNOR  
OF BAYELSA STATE AND THE PRESIDENT OF NIGERIA**

**HELD AT THE MUSON CENTRE, ONIKAN, LAGOS ON WEDNESDAY, 14<sup>TH</sup> JUNE 2023  
BY THE COALITION OF IJAW INTEREST GROUPS AND OTHER CRITICAL  
STAKEHOLDERS IN THE ENVIRONMENTAL SECTOR**

News of the recent release (on 16th May 2023) of the long-awaited Report of the Bayelsa State Oil and Environmental Commission (BSOEC) was received with hope by the People of Bayelsa State and the communities of Niger Delta in general. The high breed international panel chaired by the former Archbishop of York and now member of the UK House of Lords, Lord John Sentamu, was set up four years ago to look into and recommend remedies to the devastation caused by the oil and gas industry on the environment, social economy and human lives of Bayelsa State, which is a snapshot of the situation in the Niger Delta region - a catastrophe continuing since commercial oil production started in Nigeria (within present day Bayelsa State) in 1956.

Firstly, we commend the Commission for a job very well done and the Bayelsa State Government for the launch of the Report. We also acknowledge that the Report is a step in the right direction and an opportunity for useful insights to the destruction of the ecosystem in the region but hasten to caution that it is still far from being an achievement. The urgent and faithful implementation of its recommendations is what will indeed show a commitment to achieve the intended objectives and crystallize the huge significance of the Report. This Coalition of Ijaw interest groups and other key stakeholders have no doubt that the burden of making this happen is primarily upon the Bayelsa State Government. The state government must now move with the required sense of urgency, mindful that stakeholders in the state will consider the vigour, speed and resourcefulness with which the government responds to the recommendations of this report.

The Report is aptly titled "ENVIRONMENTAL GENOCIDE: The Human and Environmental Cost of Big Oil in Bayelsa, Nigeria". The study reports that about 110-165 million gallons of crude oil have spilled in the State over the last 50 years, amounting to 10-15 times the volume of the Exxon Valdez spill (11 million gallons) that devastated the Alaskan coastline in 1989. It reports that, for the State's population, currently projected at about 2.5m, the cumulative spill volume translates to each resident suffering an average share of one and half barrels of oil spilled, with the attendant impact. In some locations, toxic contaminants such as chromium are present in the groundwater over 1,000 (one thousand) times the World Health Organization's limit for safety.

In addition to the alarming data for gas flaring in the State, the Report also quotes research that puts at 16,000 the number of infants killed by pre-natal exposure to oil spills within a month of birth. These indices of pathology are a threat to the continued existence of the Ijaw indigenous nationality and the physical integrity of our homeland, and could therefore provoke any affected population into self-help where the governments, regulators and justice systems that should secure and rescue them have either failed them or in some cases appear to be in collaboration with the genocidal polluters.

The release of the Report at a time the world is realizing that climate change implications must be mainstreamed into every decision making is symbolic. It should reawaken us - government, the private sector, community leaders and citizens - to our sacred responsibilities to our planet and unborn generations.

The Bayelsa State Government, the Federal Government, the Ministers of Petroleum and Environment, and the regulators (NOSDRA particularly) that have brushed aside and overlooked this dangerous and destructive pollution slowly killing people in the region and desecrating the ecosystem now have a core duty and responsibility to bring this environmental genocide to an immediate stop. It is important to highlight that the report said – and we quote *“...Much of the responsibility for the current crisis must be borne by the IOCs whose activities, from the period of British colonial rule up to the present time, have inflicted much damage upon Bayelsa. But the failures of the oil producers are themselves rooted in a set of deeper institutional, legal and political problems that must be addressed if the pollution crisis is to be tackled on a sustainable basis...”*

While the oil companies and their complicit or inept regulators are directly culpable, the Bayelsa State Government has the primary sacred duty to resist the toxic impacts. We encourage and challenge the state government to slay this monster of petroleum genocide once and for all.

It was expected that the state government would at the launch of the Report make concrete announcements of specific actions already taken and to be taken to decisively deal with the plague. In the four years of waiting for the Commission’s Report, the state government appears to have done little or nothing in combating the scourge which kept occurring not only routinely as usual but also in outrageous dimensions on several occasions. Agip’s facilities drenched Lasukugbene and its surroundings with crude oil for weeks in 2021. Conoil callously spewed oil and gas repeatedly for extended periods in the Akassa axis in the same year. Shell has not only soaked Ikarama Community in spills during the period but has had NOSDRA issue clean up certificates for sites that still contain ponds of spilled oil. And the Aiteo Group that took over some oilfields and facilities in allegedly hazardous states from Shell was host of the catastrophic Santa Barbara Oilfield blowout that lasted for 5-6 weeks in 2021. The lack of any serious signal or action by the state government on any of these disasters or at the launch of the BSOEC Report is quite disappointing.

This is no time for tepid speeches, platitudes and promises but a time for action by the state government. The Bayelsa people and communities will be served well if the government can immediately demonstrate to the international environmental community government’s commitment to immediately take remedial action, rather than mere endless talk without actions and policies of consequence that will be instantly and critically felt by pollution culprits, devastated communities and the entire chain of local and global stakeholders.

In driving the implementation of the Report, we strongly recommend the following supporting actions to also be taken by the Bayelsa State Government (and/or the Federal Government and other stakeholders where appropriate):

1. An immediate formal demand to the President by the State Government, to immediately promulgate a Niger Delta-wide Environmental Remediation Programme. Several environmentally damaged communities due to oil and gas exploration activities such as Polobubo (formerly Tsekelewu) in the west Niger Delta abound.
2. Impose stern sanctions within the State’s power, including revocation of rights of way and land leases over operational sites of repeated or egregious environmental breaches.
3. Commit to dedicating 5-10% of Bayelsa State’s revenues to invest as part of the Environmental Recovery Fund proposed in the BSOEC Report, to redress its contributory responsibility for the pollution plague by reason of the state government’s failure in acting within its powers all these years to stop the scourge and safeguard its communities, environment and people. The State will reap commensurately and multidimensionally from the fruits of the recovery fund.

4. Formally institute a strong call or global campaign on shareholders of Shell, ENI/Agip, Chevron and other operators and/or their parent companies listed on the London, New York and European Stock Exchanges to demand for verifiable comprehensive reports on their environmental pollution footprint in the Niger Delta and remedial measures taken, including the environmental status of their oilfields at the time of divesting them to Nigerian private operators. Failing that, shareholders should be systematically persuaded to divest shares in these companies, as their over 60-year track record in Nigeria renders their shareholders partakers in the business of blood oil. Their home governments should as well be officially engaged to trigger investigations and sanctions on these corporations.
5. Pending consummation of ongoing efforts at an international convention on ecocide, file a formal complaint with the Office of the Prosecutor in the International Criminal Court to investigate the unprecedented ecocide in Bayelsa State as environmental genocide or a continual crime against humanity. This is urgent because successive Nigerian Presidents and Ministers of Petroleum and Environment, along with the regulatory agencies under their supervision, including most incumbents in those offices, are deeply complicit by commission or omission in the fossil fuel industry's ecocide in the Niger Delta. They have been conditioned by the Nigerian system to never feel any incentive to act.
6. Appoint and capacitate a Bayelsa State Special Counsel on Environmental Justice Enforcement, with adequate provisioning and periodic public reporting obligations.
7. Appoint and make suitable provisions for an Honorary/Grand Patron or Goodwill Ambassador of the Environment that will leverage international contacts, global social capital and cognate institutions to actualize an "Environmental Marshall Plan" for the State, indeed the Niger Delta region.
8. NDDC and HYPREP: The Federal Government should properly fund, stabilize and sanitize these two agencies (Niger Delta Development Commission and Hydrocarbon Pollution Remediation Project) that are vested with statutory mandates for the environmental sustainability and remediation of the Niger Delta or, for HYPREP, the Ogoni area of the region. Both bodies have been trailed for years by reports and scandals of entrenched corruption, vested external interests/interferences, substandard execution of projects, ghost contracts and subverted tendering/procurement processes, budgetary abnormalities, plus series of arbitrary cum illegal appointments and removal of their executives. The new federal administration should beam a searchlight on these important organizations, to arrest the recurrent travesties and reposition them in accordance with their enabling laws for full delivery of their objectives, including the ecological mandate of NDDC. The functional failure or unabated drift of either or both would create huge setbacks for any expectations of satisfactory environmental remediation and social recovery in the region and throw the region into a tailspin. That spectre and its implications for Nigeria should be a cause for concern to all, home and abroad.

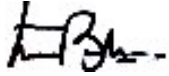
**INADEQUACY OF PROPOSED RECOVERY FUND:** Finally, we consider the BSOEC's recommendation of \$12 billion for the Bayelsa State Recovery Fund to be grossly underestimated, in cognizance of the cumulative length, volumes and impacts of the petroleum sector's environmental genocide in Bayelsa. The estimate must be carefully reviewed for adequacy by the State Government and key parties.

The people of Bayelsa State expect the brisk, faithful execution of the Lord Sentamu Report's action points, and to hear particularly from the Federal Government and the Bayelsa State Government without further delay. Let us stop the talk and clean up the oiled wasteland. Only then can our People trust our governments.

We invite all people of conscience to please join your voices and efforts to this cause.

Thank you for your attention.

Signed:



Efiye Bribena  
Secretary, Ijaw Elders Forum (IEF), Lagos



Mr. Ben Amaebi Okoro  
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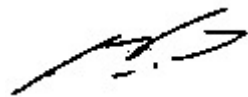
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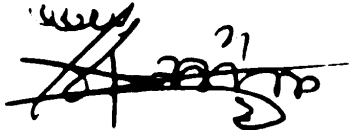
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