
[A positive change in oil activities in Nigeria?](#)

The Urhobo National Assembly (UNA), which represents the Urhobo nation in the Nigerian federal state, stopped all oil exploration activities in the region of the Niger Delta, where an oil spill fire destroyed last September a large area of fragile ecosystems. Once again the involved oil company is Royal Dutch Shell. It will remain expelled from several affected communities until an independent investigation on the explosion has been satisfactorily conducted and made known by experts from several Southern countries. The Urhobo also demanded for immediate clean up of all polluted land, as well as compensation. "When this spill occurred we thought we will be treated like human beings. But this has gone a long way to prove right what our other neighbours have been telling us about oil firms, especially Shell, about their insincerity" said a leader of the Ikerre community.

As usual, Shell has not assumed any responsibility for the peoples' suffering. A trustworthy source of Shell admitted to ERA (Environmental Rights Action) at the Aluu-Agbada West flow station, that the pipes are very old and cannot withstand the much pressure. He attributed the frequent spills being experienced to this factor, among others. The last case of September 17 and 18 of 1999 has not been the only one in the Niger Delta. On December 12 of 1998 a blowout occurred on a Shell flow line leading to the Aluu-Agbada West flow station. The accident contributed to the pollution of the Onuigbo river, which is the only source of drinking water and fishing for the Omuike people.

In relation to the present situation of the country regarding communities and the environment, the Ijaw Youth Council stated that: "Nigeria is standing still on the ocean of oppression. We must move away from sinister waves of violence that have been let loose by the agents of injustice. We have only one option. We either march most relentlessly towards the finishing line of self-determination, resource control, environmental protection and a truly Federal Nigeria or be drowned."

In a surprising move that can mean a positive switch, the Federal Government has blamed the situation in the Niger Delta on what it called "heinous environmental crimes" of multinational oil companies. It also traced the killing of Ken Saro Wiwa and other activists to the activities of the oil companies. The government's spokesperson has been the Minister of State for Environment, Dr. Ime Okopido, who on October 22 outlined strict conditions for oil firms in the Niger Delta and gave them a six-week ultimatum to clean up the communities' environment. Nevertheless, only the future actions of the authorities will reflect how much they are interested in defending their own people's interests. The Nigerian Government has been and is still being severely criticised at the national as well as at the international level for its violation of human and environmental rights.

Sources: ERA-FoE Nigeria, 3/10/99; ERA Field Reports 41, 14/10/99; Oilwatch,