

THE SENATE

Wednesday, November 22, 1995

The Senate met at 1:30 p.m., the Speaker *pro tempore* in the Chair.

Prayers.

SENATORS' STATEMENTS

NIGERIA

EXECUTION OF KEN SARO-WIWA AND NINE OTHER Ogoni ACTIVISTS

Hon. Jean-Louis Roux: Honourable senators, I was shocked and appalled by the execution by hanging on November 10, 1995 of nine leaders of the Ogoni people in Nigeria at the hands of the military dictatorship of General Sani Abacha. One of these activists was the internationally acclaimed writer Ken Saro-Wiwa.

[*Translation*]

In addition to defending the rights of the Ogoni people, Ken Saro-Wiwa was a well-known writer and ardent environmentalist. He was president of the association of writers of Nigeria and known as a human rights activist through Amnesty International and PEN International, and for his defence of environmental rights through Greenpeace. In 1990, he abandoned his literary career to found the Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People.

[*English*]

Led by Ken Saro-Wiwa, the 500,000 Ogonis mobilized en masse to claim their fair share of the billions of dollars extracted from their homeland by multinational oil companies, such as Shell and Mobil. Several observers have noted that the revenues generated by this exploitation, an estimated \$100 billion since 1960, were used indirectly to finance the repression of the Ogonis by the military rulers. As well, the Ogonis demand compensation for the ecological devastation caused to their traditional economy, which is based on fishing and agriculture, by badly maintained pipelines and oil blow-outs.

Despite the Ogonis' commitment to non-violence, an intervention by the Nigerian military to crush a demonstration against Shell in January 1993 led to the destruction of several villages and the mindless killing of several hundred innocent victims. In November 1993, the military junta annulled the presidential elections and incarcerated the presumed victor, arrested and persecuted hundreds of pro-democracy activists,

muzzled the press, and engaged in widespread repression and corruption.

[*Translation*]

Saro-Wiwa was jailed in May 1994, after being charged with planning the murder of four pro-government Ogoni chiefs. Although he declared that he was innocent and was not even present when the incident took place, Saro-Wiwa and his fellow defendants were sentenced to death for these murders by a special tribunal, in a flagrant denial of the fundamental rights of the defendants, which was unanimously condemned as a parody of justice by many international observers. At least two witnesses have admitted they were paid by the government.

Despite appeals for clemency and protests from many organizations and many countries, General Abacha cynically turned a deaf ear and confirmed his odious reputation by executing the nine Ogoni activists. Outrage among the international community was instantaneous. In a decision unprecedented in the history of that organization, Commonwealth members, meeting in Auckland, New Zealand at the time the nine Ogoni leaders were executed, imposed a two-year suspension on Nigeria, during which time it would have to restore democracy and respect for human rights or otherwise be formally excluded from the organization. The European Union also broke off all cooperation with the military regime of General Abacha. Many countries, including Canada, also withdrew their ambassadors from Abuja, the capital of Nigeria.

We have known for some time the dangers inherent in political systems where freedom of expression is curtailed and any hint of dissent is silenced. Writer Ken Saro-Wiwa was among the first to be critical of the system in his country, Nigeria. The whole world will always be indebted to him, and I urge all my colleagues to pay him the tribute he deserves, bearing in mind this very apt comment by Albert Camus in *Le témoin de la liberté*:

In a world in which we are condemned to die, the artist testifies to that which refuses to die in us...

[*English*]

• (1340)

GUN CONTROL LEGISLATION

Hon. Marjory LeBreton: Honourable senators, I wish to put on the record that I, like many of my colleagues, support strict gun control laws. I was honoured to be part of the government which legislated some of the strictest gun control laws in the world, particularly as the law relates to handguns and assault weapons.