

TAKING ON THE ENVIRONMENTAL ASSAULT

After years of reckless environmental assault, the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People, under the leadership of Ken Saro-Wiwa, took on the Anglo-Dutch Shell Company who have bestrode the Niger Delta like a vampire since they first struck oil at Oloibiri in 1956 with the aid of a local oracle. This pioneering effort at giving civil society a voice against environmental degradation has had a very high toll. The Nigerian State murdered Saro-Wiwa and eight other Ogoni activists on November 10, 1995. This was ostensibly in an effort to pave the way for the return of Shell into Ogoni land where they had been declared persona non grata. Today the resolve of the Ogoni not to succumb to intimidation has resulted in many deaths, much harassment and many living as refugees both in and outside Nigeria.

Recently the Ijaw youths under the umbrella of the Ijaw Youth Council issued the now famous "Kaiama Declaration" on December 11, 1998 at a meeting attended by over 5000 delegates. In the Declaration they noted among others that ? The quality of life of Ijaw people is deteriorating as a result of utter neglect, suppression and marginalisation visited on the people by the alliance of the Nigerian state and transnational oil companies.

- the political crisis in Nigeria is mainly about the struggle for the control of oil mineral resources
- oil resources account for over 80% of GDP, 95 % of national budget and 90% of foreign exchange earnings. They asserted that from this, 65%, 75% and 70% respectively are derived from within the Ijaw nation. They also complained that despite these huge contributions, their reward from the Nigerian State remains avoidable deaths resulting from ecological devastation and military repression.
- the continued damage done to our fragile natural environment and to the health of our people is due in the main to uncontrolled exploration and exploitation of crude oil and natural gas which has led to numerous oil spillage, uncontrolled gas flaring, the opening up of our forests to loggers, indiscriminate canalisation, flooding, land subsidence, coastal erosion, earth tremors etc.
- oil and gas are exhaustible resources and the complete lack of concern for ecological rehabilitation, of lands from where the resources are mined point at a bleak future.
- the degradation of the environment of by transnational oil companies and the Nigerian State arose mainly because the people have been robbed of their natural rights to ownership and control of their land and resources.

THE DEMANDS

The demands outlined in the Kaiama declaration find parallels in the Ogoni Bill of Rights and have increasingly become the accepted platform for agitation by the wider Niger Delta peoples. This is a result of broad consultations and exchanges between civil society groups. Some of the key resolutions are:

- All land and natural resources (including mineral resources) belong to communities on whose territory such resources are found and are the basis of their survival.