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JusticeInNigeriaNow.org

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Civil Society Groups Call on ICC Prosecutor to Investigate Military Violence in the Niger Delta

THE HAGUE (May 20) – As military attacks continue in the Niger Delta’s oil producing Gbaramatu Kingdom, environmental and human rights groups call for an immediate investigation by the International Criminal Court’s (ICC) Office of the Prosecutor of those responsible.

“This appears to be a systematic and widespread campaign of violence against its own citizens by the Armed Forces of the Nigerian government,” Says Sandy Cioffi Director of Sweet Crude. Reports suggest that thousands of innocent civilians may be dead as a result.

On Wednesday, May 13, the Nigerian military Joint Task Force (JTF) commenced the land, water and aerial bombardment of a large area in the Niger Delta called the Gbaramatu Kingdom that includes the villages of Oporoza, Kurutie, Kunukunuma, Kokodiagbene, Okerenkoko, Azama, Benikurukuru and Ubefan, under the guise of attacking a MEND militant Camp.

“We in the human rights and independent media community are gravely concerned that the military is not allowing access to humanitarian aid organizations, human rights groups or journalists,” Cioffi said

Residents of the villages and those visiting the area for a festival on the day the bombing began were forced to flee their homes and villages. They are hiding in the bush and do not have adequate food or medical supplies. According to Elias Courson, Rotary World Peace Fellow at UC Berkeley the military has secured the area. Innocent civilians cannot get out of the secured zone and are facing starvation.

“The ICC office of the Prosecutor must investigate all parties that may be responsible for this bloodshed including General Sarkin Bello and President Yar'Adua.” Courson said.

Together Justice In Nigeria Now, TransAfrica Forum, Oil Change International, Rainforest Action Network, Global Exchange, Communities for a Better Environment, the Asian Pacific Environmental Network, the Center for Third World Organizing, Crude Accountability, CounterCorp, the filmmakers of Sweet Crude, The Borneo Project, The Sustainable Energy and Economy Network, Foreign Policy in Focus and University of KwaZulu-Natal Centre for Civil Society Environmental Justice Project urged the ICC's Office of the Prosecutor to use its power to investigate those responsible for these crimes against humanity, including Brigadier General Sarkin Bello who is reportedly in command of the JTF's operations today. Questions regarding President Yar'Adua's involvement must also be investigated.

Full letter

International Criminal Court
Office of the Prosecutor
Mr. Luis Moreno Ocampo
Post Office Box 19519
2500 CM The Hague
The Netherlands

Also sent by email to otp.informationdesk@icc-cpi.int

Also sent by fax to +31 70 515 85 55

May 19, 2009

Dear Mr. Moreno Ocampo:

The organizations listed below write to draw your urgent attention to the unfolding humanitarian crisis in Gbaramatu Kingdom in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. We request that the Office of the Prosecutor open an immediate investigation into those responsible for what appears to be a systematic and widespread campaign of violence against civilians by the Armed Forces of the Nigerian government.

On Wednesday, May 13, 2009 the Nigerian military Joint Task Force (JTF) commenced the land, water and aerial bombardment of a large area in Gbaramatu Kingdom that includes the villages of Oporoza, Kurutie, Kunukunuma, Kokodiagbene, Okerenkoko, Azama, Benikurukuru and Ubefan, under the guise of attacking a MEND militant Camp. Residents of the villages and those visiting for a festival on the day the bombing began were forced to flee their homes and villages. They are hiding in the bush and do not have adequate food or medical supplies. The JTF has not allowed humanitarian aid groups or journalists into the area. As of today the coordinated aerial and ground attacks by the

JTF and mass starvation continues. Reports suggest that thousands of innocent civilians are dead already. Reports also suggest that this was a well planned attack with the possible collusion of State government officials.

Together the human rights and environmental organizations listed below urge the ICC's Office of the Prosecutor to use its power to investigate and prosecute those responsible for these crimes against humanity, including Brigadier General Sarkin Bello who is reportedly in command of the JTF's operations today. Questions regarding President Yar'Adua's involvement must also be investigated.

The killings in the Delta today can be traced back to similar massacres in 1990 in Umecheum, in Ogoni led by Major Gen Paul Okuntimo in the mid 1990's, and the 1999 massacre in Odi under the command of Col Agbabiaka. To-date no investigation of previous massacres has been undertaken, although each was well documented by the international NGO community, including Human Rights Watch.

The Nigerian military must be made aware that it cannot act with impunity. We respectfully request your attention and investigation. Your interest and involvement in this matter has the potential to help save lives in the oil rich regions of the Niger Delta now and in the future.

Sincerely,

Imani Countess for TransAfrica Forum

Patrick Bond for the University of KwaZulu-Natal Centre for Civil Society
Environmental Justice Project

Sandy Cioffi for Sweet Crude

Bill Gallegos for Communities for a Better Environment

Jessica Lawrence for The Borneo Project

Laura Livoti for Justice in Nigeria Now

Danielle Mahonnes for the Center for Third World Organizing

Kirsten Moller for Global Exchange

Brant Olson for Rainforest Action Network

Roger Kim for Asian Pacific Environmental Network

Michelle Kinman for Crude Accountability

Steve Kretzmann for Oil Change International

John Wilner for CounterCorp

Emira Woods for Foreign Policy In Focus

Daphne Wysham for Sustainable Energy and Economy Network

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