

ENVIRONMENTAL RIGHTS ACTION (ERA) / FRIENDS OF THE EARTH, NIGERIA (FoEN)

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ERA FIELD REPORT 189

SUBJECT: Chevron security shoots peaceful protesters at Aruntan - Ugborodo community.

DESPATCHLINE: Ugborodo community, Delta State, Nigeria

FROM: Obayanju Wale, Murphy Akiri and Stephen Omajugho

DATE: November 25, 2008

INTRODUCTION

Aruntan-Ugborodo is an Itsekiri community of Delta state, Nigeria. The people are predominantly fishermen and petty traders. It is the closest community to a Chevron Nigeria Limited (CNL) *Tank farm* in the area.

Ugborodo is made up of several small communities that includes Aruntan, Madanwo and Ijala. The community is reached in 90 minutes by speedboat ride from Warri.

ARUNTAN- UGBORODO COMMUNITY AND ENVIRONS

During the visit we observed that several Shell oil well heads abandoned at various point on the water ways had polluted the waters and consequently the lush Niger Delta mangroves were dying.

Coastal erosion is a major challenge at Aruntan and most of the Ugborodo communities. Two major shore protection projects embarked upon by NDDC (Niger Delta Development Commission) were seen abandoned along Madanwo and Aruntan communities respectively.

Aruntan had two primary schools, one a private initiative and the Government. The Government primary school was recently built but has remained shut.

During the visit the locals recounted their tales of woes to ERA/FoEN Monitors:

TESTIMONIES

Mr Isaac Botosan, the vice chairman of Ugborodo Community Trust spoke on the relationship between CNL and the community.

CNL came into our community as the then Gulf Oil a year after my birth, 1963. Their operation started on Okan field, a land leased by our fathers to this company.



Due to the location of the tank farm and the risk involved, only expatriates and our community men were willing to work here. So our people were amongst the workforce of the then Gulf Oil.

But with the coming of CNL some 20 or more years ago, the workforce contributed by our community to CNL dropped drastically.

We wrote several times to CNL, and always copied the Government, complaining about the situation, which gave rise to the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding by the community leaders, CNL and the State Government to the end that 5 working slots and possible contracts are provided amongst other issues. But CNL never implemented this MoU.

CNL later said that they never kept to their promise on the MoU because they signed the document under duress. This was not true, as all parties signed the documents voluntarily. This complaint from CNL and the establishment of the EGTL (Escravos Gas to Liquid) project led to the signing of another Global Memorandum of Understanding, GMoU in 2006 which we all signed.

The promise of “common job” slots and awarding of contracts to us indigenes has not been kept by CNL. We decided to conduct this peaceful protest on Thursday 20, November 2008 to CNL operatives in the tank farm because series of letters had gone to them with no reply.

To our greatest shock our youths, women and children met with gunfire from CNL security personnel who started shooting at the sight of the community peaceful demonstrator's boat. Several of the youths sustained minor injuries, while two others a young woman (Miss Toju Akitikori) and a boy received serious gunshot wounds right in their homes.

All we want are job for our youths and contracts for the able community people. We don't want gifts of money.



Mr Yakubu, the community Youth secretary gave his side of the story

Some time last week (Thursday 20th, November 2008) community people comprising about 15-20 women, 8 children and 25 youths embarked on a peaceful protest to CNL Tank Farm - a stone's throw from our homes. We were demanding “common job” slot for our youths, awarding of contract to deserving indigenes and for the protection of our shore lines from coastal erosion that is encroaching into our homes.

We dressed in white singlet (T-shirts) and carried placards. No guns, No machete and no form of weapons of mass destructions were on us. We were shocked to see the JTF officers guarding the CNL Tank farm releasing gunshot sporadically on us in the boat and into the community.

We took cover for our dear lives. Several of our youths had gunshot wounds and received serious wounds from the stray shots. (They are currently being treated in effort).

Mrs. Patience Fregene, a petty trader and Sister in law to one of the victims narrated





I was on my way to sew my dress away from home when I started heard gunshots. I took to my heels and ran home to see to the welfare of my children.

As I got close to the house I saw a very thick smoke arising from an exploded material, which I suspect to be a grenade. This explosion left my sister-in-law with a hand and leg injury. My dressing mirror and other properties were destroyed. There are many bullet holes in the walls.

I thank God none of my children was hurt following my instruction that in case of a gunshot they should always take cover (lie down flat on the floor). Presently my sister-in-law, Miss Toju Akitikori is receiving treatment in Warri courtesy of the community aid.

We don't know what CNL wants. Do they want us out of our fatherland or what do they want? They should please tell us.

Mr Joseph Uwanikone, the Youth leader of the community also spoke to ERA.

On the protest? Yes we had a peaceful protest on Thursday 20th November, 2008 following the non-employment of our youths in the ongoing CNL EGTL (Escravos Gas to Liquid) project. We took it upon ourselves to cry out to the company to employ our youths - not for the expatriate jobs but for the labor job or "common job" slots. We had no weapon, only placards, white flags and white singlet.

The next thing we heard and saw were armed JTF officers and their gun boat shooting at us. We had no option but to take cover (run for safety). Some of our people sustained gunshot injuries in the process.

Community Demands that:

- * Chevron to secure the coastland to prevent further erosion
- * Chevron to provide "common jobs" and award contracts to indigenes of Ugborodo community
- * Chevron to desist from using violence to counter peaceful community demands
- * Chevron to clean up and stop polluting our environment.

WHAT YOU CAN DO:

- * Write to Chevron as well as the Delta State Government, requesting for full compliance to the GMoU entered into by the 3 parties
- * Write NDDC and demand the completion of the abandoned shore-line protection project

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The Director,
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