**Factsheet on the Ogoni Struggle**

**The Ogoni People of Nigeria**

The Ogoni are a people of approximately 500 000, who live in Ogoni, a region in Rivers State, Nigeria. The region of Ogoni only has an area of 650 square kilometers, resulting in a very high population density. Despite this high population density, the extraordinary fertility of the Niger delta has historically allowed the Ogoni to make a good living as subsistence farmers and fishing people. Currently, however, this lifestyle is being threatened. A MOSOP statement reads: "The once-beautiful Ogoni countryside is no more a source of fresh air and green vegetation. All one sees and feels around is death."

The threat to the Ogoni people started when Shell discovered oil there in 1958. At that time, Nigeria was still under British colonial rule, and the Ogoni had no say in the oil exploitation. With the coming of independence in 1960 the Ogoni situation did not improve - being a minority ethnic group in a country which has a current population of 88 million, the Ogoni have never had an effective say in Nigerian politics.

**Nigeria - The Broader Situation**

One of the factors hampering the Ogoni struggle is the organisation of the Nigerian state. Historically, the Nigerian region has been dominated by three large ethnic groups - the Hausa-Fulani, the Yoruba and the Ibo. The British colonial government exploited this situation by ruling through the existing aristocracy, reinforcing the historical imbalances already present. The post-colonial history of Nigeria has been marked by massive instability, including a number of coups, as a result of conflict between these three groups. The smaller ethnic groups, such as the Ogoni, have been systematically excluded from positions of power. Furthermore, under the 1989 constitution, mineral rights in Nigeria are held by the federal government, a structure which has been unresponsive to Ogoni grievances even under 'democratic' governments.

When the Ogoni started their protests, Nigeria was ruled by the military dictatorship of Gen. Ibrahim Babangida. Gen. Babangida held out the promise of democracy by calling a Presidential election in June 1993. The victory of Chief Moshood Abiola was, however, unnaceptable to the military regime, and power was handed over to a military appointed interim national government. This was, in turn, ousted by Gen. Sani Abacha, in November 1993. This succession of military governments led to the formation of NADECO (National Democratic Coalition) in May 1994. Abiola attempted to assert his power in June 1994 by declaring himself President, an action which resulted in his imprisonment for treason.

As the situation in Nigeria has deteriorated, so Gen. Abacha's regime has become more draconian. Between the 3rd and the 13th of March 1995, a number of active and retired military officers were arrested by Gen. Abacha, on charges of plotting a coup. Foremost amongst the arrested officers was General (Retd) Olusegun Obasanjo. Obasanjo was head of state of Nigeria from 1976 to 1979, when he handed over power to a civilian government, the only Nigerian military leader ever to have done so. Since then he has played a leading role in international monitoring of African rulers, including being a high ranking member of the anti-corruption group Transparency International. Obasanjo has also been critical of the military regime in Nigeria.

The sentencing of Gen. Obasanjo and his co-accused took place in July 1995, amid yet another clampdown on pro-democracy activists. The accused were tried in a secret military tribunal, and the Provisional Ruling Council (PRC) reviewed their sentences before they were made public. Though no information has officially been made public about the sentences, it is believed that Obasanjo was sentenced to life imprisonment, whilst Major-General Shehu Musa Yar'Adua and 13 others were sentenced to death.

**Shell in Nigeria**

  
'The flames of Shell are flames of Hell,   
We bask below their light,   
Nought for us to serve the blight,   
Of cursed neglect and cursed Shell.'   
- Ogoni Song

Shell operations in Nigeria are operated by the Shell Petroleum Development Company (SPDC) in a joint venture agreement with the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC). Almost 14% of Shell's production - the greatest production outside the USA - comes from Nigeria. Since Shell started operations in Nigeria, Ogoni has yielded about 30 billion dollars in oil revenues. The Nigerian state is heavily dependent on oil sales, with oil accounting for around 80% of government revenue. In fact, the oil industry is at present the only part of the Nigerian economy which hasn't largely collapsed. (Although under Abacha's regime, the NNPC has been unable to meet its commitments to joint venture partners in the oil industry, largely due to Abacha's disastarous economic policy)

The environment effects of having more than 100 oil wells (most of which are Shell owned) in Ogoni territory have been severe. Between 1976 and 1991, almost 3000 seperate oil spills, averaging 700 barrels each, occured in the Niger delta. Response to oil spills is slow, and often very damaging. A major spill at Ebubu in 1970 was set alight, causing irreperable damage to the ground it spilled on. Though the area of the spill is unuseable, and still leaks oil into surrounding water supplies, Shell has it recorded having been cleaned up twice. The more recent experience of Osaro Okochi, a farmer from Eleme, who was still waiting for a pipeline to be fixed 6 weeks after it started leaking, shows that Shell has not improved its record since.

Oil spills are not the only environmental disaster the Ogoni have to deal with. Gas flares, burning 24 hours a day (some of them for the last 30 years), are often situated near Ogoni villages. The villagers have to live with the constant noise of the flare, and the area is covered in thick soot, which contaminates water supplies when it rains. Air pollution from the flares results in acid rain and respiratory problems in the surrounding community. Shell pipelines pass above ground through villages and over what was once agricultural land. Despite Shell's claims to the contrary, no pipeline has ever been re-routed. A case in the UK, where a pipeline required 17 different environmental surveys before construction, highlights the extent of Shell's environmental racism in Ogoni - the Ogoni have never seen a single environmental impact assesment.

The Nigerian government echoes Shell's lack of concern for the effects that oil production have had on the Ogoni people. In response to enquiries from Katma Films during the making of 'The Drilling Fields', the Nigerian High Commision in London had this to say: "Ogoni land is one of the first places in Nigeria in which oil prospection was undertaken. It is, therefore, true to expect that the environmental impact could be more pronounced."

**The Ogoni Struggle against Shell**

  
'We either win this war to save our land, or we will be exterminated, because we have nowhere to run to.'   
- Ken Saro-Wiwa, MOSOP

To protest against Shell's actions and the Nigerian government's indifference, the Ogoni people founded MOSOP, the Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People, in 1992, under the leadership of the Nigerian author, Ken Saro-Wiwa. This is how Saro-Wiwa has described their struggle: "The Ogoni people have now decided to make a last ditch stand against the government and against Shell that have ripped them off for the last 35 years." On Monday the 4th of January, 1993, 300 000 Ogoni staged a peaceful mass protest against Shell Oil and the environmental destruction of Ogoni land. This was timed to coincide with the start of the world year of indigenous people.

The situation in Ogoni soon deteriorated. As a response to the beating of a Shell worker in January 1993, Shell withdrew its staff from Ogoni. A memo from a February meeting of Shell in London cautioned Shell PA departments to keep each other informed to ensure to "avoid unpleasant surprises." Ken Saro-Wiwa was specifically mentioned in the memo. In April, Saro-Wiwa was subjected to continual military harassment, including being held at Port Harcourt International Airport for 16 hours without charge. April also saw the first use of major military force against Ogoni protests - on the 30th of April, 10 000 Ogoni people protested at Nonwa against the construction of a pipeline by the American contracting firm Willbros on behalf of Shell. They were fired on by Nigerian soldiers, wounding 10 people. Mrs Korgbara, whose land was being bulldozed to lay the pipeline, lost her arm in the incident.

Just 4 days later, Mr Agbarator Otu was killed when he was shot in the back by Nigerian soldiers whilst protesting work on the pipeline at Nonwa. Two weeks later, Ken Saro-Wiwa had his passport seized when trying to leave for London. On the eve of the Presidential elections of the 12 of June, Saro-Wiwa again had his passport seized by the Nigerian security service when he attempted to attend a UN Conference in London.

Meanwhile, the annulment of the Presidential election by Gen. Ibrahim Babangida plunged the country into chaos. The Ogoni had boycotted the election, refusing to vote for a government which would rule under a constitution which ignored minority rights. In the crackdown on pro-democracy forces which followed Babangida's annulment of the election, Ken Saro-Wiwa and other MOSOP leaders were arrested. A march by Ogoni people on Bori in protest resulted in the Second Amphibious Brigade - the same unit involved in the shooting at Nonwa - being called in from Port Harcourt. Indiscriminate beatings and arrests of Ogoni were reported. As a result of continuing protests by the Ogoni, Saro-Wiwa was charged with sedition and released on July the 22nd.



The campaign against the Ogoni now shifted from Saro-Wiwa to the Ogoni people themselves. Government soldiers sealed off Ogoni with roadblocks, and on 30 July, Ogoni police were drafted away from the area. Just 5 days later, in what the military described as an ethnic clash between Ogonis and Andonis, the town of Kaa was attacked. Danu Mark, an inhabitant of Kaa interviewed by Saro-Wiwa reported differently: "There was no quarrel between the Ogoni and the Andoni. This was all designed by the government." Moses Deekor, another Kaa resident, described the use of heavy weapons, dynamite and grenades to destroy houses in Kaa.

Due to growing discontent, Ibrahim Babangida was forced to resign on the 26th of August. The military appoint Ernest Shonekan, former director of Shell Nigeria, as interim president. Whilst rioters in Lagos demanded a return to democracy, a series of brutal attacks on Ogoni villages left 750 people dead and 30 000 homeless. Houses and property were destroyed, and economic trees cut down. Whilst the military still claimed the cause of the violence was an Ogoni-Andoni struggle, an eyewitness at Kpean stated that the attackers spoke a language which was not Andoni. Professor Claude Ake, from the UN World Commission on Development and Culture, was appointed to look into the cause of the attacks. According to Prof. Ake, "I don't think it was purely an ethnic clash, in fact there is really no reason why it should be an ethnic clash and as far as we could determine, there was nothing in dispute in the sense of territory, fishing rights, access rights, discriminatory treatment which are the normal causes of these communal clashes"

Before Prof. Ake could complete his investigation, however, a peace accord was drawn up involving 4 representatives from the communities involved, the state government, security agents, and Shell. Prof. Ake does not believe this was done in good faith, "It was done with unseemly haste, there was no attempt to show any humanitarian concern for those who were wounded those who were displaced. No programme of rehabilitation and they just told people well stop fighting thats it go home, in particular I felt that we should have looked closely into the intensity of the fighting and the military sophistication of the conflict because this did seem to suggest that what was involved was more than a community conflict. One could not help getting the impression that there were broader forces which might have been interested in perhaps putting the Ogonis under pressure probably to derail their agenda." Ken Saro-Wiwa refused to sign the peace accord, on the basis that it called for a resumption of economic activities, including Shell oil production. Saro-Wiwa demanded a commission of enquiry into massacres to allow a lasting peace.

Three weeks after the abortive peace accord, Shell claimed that they received a phone call about a fire outbreak at Korokoro flow station. Despite the tensions in Ogoni, Shell sent in firefighting trucks. Villagers in Korokoro were suspicious when these trucks arrived, since there was no fire, and denied the team access to the flowstation. A letter from Shell to the state government then claimed that the fire trucks had been seized, and stated: 'We regret to inform you of the attack on the team comprising 24 armed personnel and 2 drivers which went to Korokoro to dialogue with the chief of the community' As a result of the response, 1 villager was shot dead, and 2 sustained serious bullet wounds.

In November of 1993, a coup brought about by Gen. Sani Abacha led to the resignation of interim President Ernest Shonekan. The new military government appointed Col. Dauda Komo as Governor of Rivers State. Soon afterwards, on the 12th of December, another raid took place, this time in Port Harcourt. 63 people were killed, in attack which took place less than 2 miles from state police headquarters, over a period of 2 days. State police failed to intervene to help Ogoni people. Increased military pressure resulted in January 1994 celebrations of Ogoni week being canceled, except for a church service which took place surrounded by soliders. Ken Saro-Wiwa could also not attend the celebrations, since he was placed under house arrest on the 2nd of January.

By the end of January 1994, the eight major oil companies estimate their losses during 1993 at 200 million dollars, due to "unfavourable conditions in the areas of operation". They called for urgent measures to combat the situation. There is considerable evidence that Shell colluded with the Nigerian government in attacks on Ogoni people. Dauda Komo was reported in April 1994 to have said that soldiers had been directed to deal with agressive communities, and if necessary shoot trouble makers. That same month, a leaked memo from the Rivers State Commisioner of Police called for "the Nigerian Army, the Nigerian Airforce, the Nigerian Navy and the Nigerian Police" to "restore and maintain law and order in Ogoni land." The reason for this mobilisation was clearly stated in the memo: "the purpose of this operation order is to ensure that ordinary law abiding citizens of the area, non-indigenous resident of carrying out business ventures or schooling within Ogoniland are not molested". An even more sinister memo, dated May 12th 1994, refers to Shell directly: "Shell operations still impossible unless ruthless military operations are undertaken for smooth economic activities to commence." The document goes on to recommend the "wasting" of Ogoni leaders. This memo was signed by Lt. Col. Paul Okuntimo of the Rivers State Internal Security Task.

Okuntimo is also on record as having stated on American network television: "I will just take some detachments of soldiers; they will stay at four corners of the town. They have automatic rifles that sound as death... We shall surround the town at night... The machine gun with 500 rounds will open up and then we are throwing grenades and they are making eekpuwaa... and they know I am around. What do you think the people are going to do? We have already put roadblocks on the main road, we do not want anybody to start running... so the option we have made was that we should drive all these people into the bush with nothing except the pants and the wrapper they are using that night." These tactics are chillingly similar to Danu Mark's description of the massive use of force involved in the 'Andoni' attack on Kaa.

As massive violence failed to stop Ogoni protests, Sani Abacha targeted Ogoni leaders. In April 1994, 15 Ogoni leaders, including Ken Saro-Wiwa's brother, Dr. Owens Wiwa, were arrested. While military operations against the Ogoni continued, intervention by MOSOP leaders, including Ken Saro-Wiwa, resulting in the release on bail of some of those arrested. The Nigerian state targetted Saro-Wiwa, stopping him from attending Ogoni protests during April.

Ken Saro-Wiwa was seized from his home by armed forces at 1:00 am on the 22nd of May. On the 25th of May, Saro-Wiwa managed to smuggle out a statement from the Bori Military Camp where he was being held without charges against him. He rejected Col. Komo's allegations that he was involved in the murder of four Ogoni leaders - in fact, he was not in Ogoni at the time. Saro-Wiwa was held without charge for a number of months, before he was officially charged with the murder. He was denied legal representation or medical attention, even though he reportedly suffered 4 heart attacks during his time in detention.

Ken's trial was marked with irregularitions, including the failure of the state to present their evidence against Saro-Wiwa. As a result of this, Ken Saro-Wiwa's defence team withdrew late in June. On October 31, 1995, Ken Saro Wiwa was sentenced to death, along with eight of his co-trialists. The sentence immediately drew an international outcry by concerned persons and organisations, including Earthlife Africa, Amnesty International, Friends of the Earth, Greenpeace and others. Governments, however, were notable by their silence.

The Commonwealth conference held from the 9th of November was overshadowed by the issue of Ken Saro Wiwas sentence. Despite growing evidence that the Nigerian regime intended to speedily execute Ken, Commonwealth leaders, led by President Nelson Mandela, did not respond strongly. Mr Ken Wiwa, the son of the imprisoned MOSOP leader, failed to secure an audience with President Mandela, even when information was received that Ken's execution was immenent.

Ken Saro Wiwa was executed on a hastily built gallows in Port Harcourt on the morning of the 10th of November. His execution resulted in an international outcry, and the near-immediate suspension of Nigeria from the Commonwealth.

**Shell's response to criticism**

Shell's response to criticism has largely been to deny that there is a problem. Shell Nigeria's 1995 publication 'The Ogoni Issue' states "allegations of environmental devastation in Ogoni, and elsewhere in our operating area, are simply not true. We do have environmental problems but these do not add up to anything like devastation." Yet, in the same pamphlet, Shell admits to the existence of 3000 sites effected by drilling operations, spread across the Delta, the flaring of 1100 million standard cubic feet of gas a day, and the occurence of acid rain one month a year in the Delta. Maybe this does not count as devastatation to a large transnational like Shell, but to the people living with Shell it clearly does.

Shell further tries to exonorate itself by claiming that most of MOSOP's demands are "outside the business scope of oil operating companies and within the government's sphere of responsibility". Shell Nigeria strongly denies its complicity in the massacre of Ogonis, and claims that the authenticity of a Government House fact sheet linking Shell to military actions taken against the Ogoni "may be questioned". (No reasons for considering the document questionable are, however, given) The fact remains, however, that Shell Nigeria (ie. the SPDC), through its status as operator of the NNPC/Shell Nigeria joint venture, plays a highly significant role in the Nigerian economy. Its position is already such that it is a political player - as has been noted above, when Shell calls for aid in Ogoni, the military react, often with brutal force. And the basis of Ogoni demands is the environmental damage which results from Shell actions.

Shell further claims that the Nigerian legal system is the correct venue to resolve MOSOP's demands - yet it is precisely the Nigerian 'legal system' which has allowed Shell to continue its environmental devastation. The repressive political arena in Nigeria has directly benefited the economic arena within which Shell Nigeria operates.

The relationship between the economic and political aims of Shell internationally is seen in a comment made by John Drake of Shell South Africa, when asked to respond to the disparity between Shell South Africa's human rights ad campaign, and the actions of Shell in Nigeria: "The justification for Shell South Africa (Pty) Limited taking the position it did was that the legitimate business interests of our stakeholders in South Africa, including our employees, were prejudiced by the political system." In Nigeria, where Shell employees (eg. ex-director Ernest Shonekan) are favoured by the political system, political interests are clearly different.

**Important actions in Support of the Ogoni Struggle**

**International sanctions against Nigeria**

The execution of Ken Saro Wiwa and his eight co-trialists led to the suspension of Nigeria from the Commonwealth. Whilst this is an encouraging first step, and international leaders seem to have finally realised the nature of the Abacha regime, it is hardly an adaquate step.

It is vital that international pressure intensify. Diplomatic pressure in the form of suspension from the UN, and other bodies, is needed. A sports boycott of Nigeria is needed immediately. And most importantly, economic sanctions need to be imposed on Nigeria. As has been stated often before, the Nigerian dictatorship relies on its oil revenue to survive. A boycott of Nigerian oil is vitally needed.

Continuous pressure on Nigeria must be kept up until such time as Nigeria is fully democratised. The rule of the military in Nigeria must end, and steps must be taken to redress minority grievances about injustices of the Nigerian constitution. Multinational exploitation of the Nigerian people and the Nigerian environment must be addressed.

**International Boycott of Shell**

Recently, the boycott of Shell products (particularly in Germany) which occured as a result of their decision to dump the Brent Spar oil rig in the North Atlantic resulted in Shell reversing their decision. A similar international boycott campaign could force Shell Nigeria to break its alliance with the Nigerian dictatorship. An appropriate date to work towards here would be Ogoni Day 1996, which occurs in January. Momentum should be gathered by organisations internationally (eg. Earthlife Africa, the Ogoni Community Associate, Oilwatch, Earth First!, Greenpeace, TransAfrica) for a campaign towards an action on that date.

Beyond the immediate aim of putting pressure on the Nigerian dictatorship, the role that Shell has played must be highlighted. This is not the first time Shell has been involved in human rights abuse - Shell fueled the Apartheid police force in the 1970s, and used precisely the same arguments to justify its inaction then as now. A boycott of Shell must include the aim of pressurising Shell to formally take responsibility for the political and environmental reprecussions of its actions, wherever they may take place.

**Conclusion**

Shell Nigeria's actions are indicative of the nature of transnational corporations. Their actions denote a hypocritical approach to the value of human life and the environment - actions routinely taken in Ogoni would be unthinkeable in the 'developed' countries of the North who buy most of Shell's oil. The devastation of Ogoni is also part of a familiar pattern - through the exploitation of oil, the Ogoni's chief livelyhood, their land, is being poisoned. Soon they will have not choice but become players in the economic system from which Shell derives its dominance. It is too late to save Ken Saro Wiwa now, but thousands of Ogoni are still under threat. It is crucial that action be taken to support Ogoni and the Nigerian people now!

'Be proud, be proud, Ogoni people be proud   
We shall no longer allow the world to cheat us'   
- Ogoni song