

Sent: Wednesday, February 23, 2005 2:40 AM

Subject: [ljaw_National_Congress] AGAIN, GENOCIDE IN THE NIGER DELTA

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“When the soldiers arrived at the community yesterday with their gunboats, our people thought they came for peace, and so no one raised any dust. Our chiefs gathered immediately at the palace of the Amanyanabo to await the soldiers to explain their mission, but the next thing that happened was shooting, shooting, shooting.... firing and firing. The soldiers were shooting at everyone, and started burning houses at the waterside”

– Philemon Kelly Dickson, Odioma community spokesperson

“We are so surprised. Government says they are for peace but it is killing and killing. We never killed anybody, so why this?”

–
Reuben Diepre, Odioma community youth president

The Destruction Of Odioma

On Sunday 20 February 2005, the Deputy Governor of Bayelsa, Dr Goodluck Jonathan, led a team of government officials, and journalists to Odioma, or to the area once known as Odioma¹ community, to see what some community representatives reported had happened to Odioma. The scene that confronted the government team was more dumbfounding than the reports. Several buildings including houses, toilets, stores, barns, churches, and shrines have been burnt down right from the waterfront to almost all parts of the town. More than 90% of the buildings in the community have been burnt down, and over 1500 persons have killed while about 3000 others are held hostage by soldiers, according to Philemon Dickson the community spokesperson that was part of the team that visited.

This destruction was carried out on the morning of Saturday 19 February 2005 by a joint task force of Nigerian army and navy personnel who were deployed to the area to maintain peace, law and order following the tension that had been generated in the area over a disputed ownership of land where SHELL had started the drilling of oil wells and a flow station designated as Toru-9 flow station. The land in dispute is an area known as OWUKUBU located along the Santa Barbara River. The ownership of Owukubu is being claimed by Odioma community on one hand and Obioku² / Bassambiri communities on the other hand.

¹[1] Odioma is in Brass Local Government Area of Bayelsa State. It is a Nembe community.

²[2] Obioku is in Nembe Local Government Area of Bayelsa State. It is a Nembe community

SHELL And The Communities

When SHELL discovered oil at Owukubu and muted the plan of establishing the Toru-9 flow station there, representatives and chiefs of Odioma, Obioku and Bassambiri communities were invited for negotiations. But the Odioma community representatives had worked out of the meeting with SHELL because they claimed that they are the sole owners of the Owukubu, and that Obioku and Bassambiri communities should not be negotiated with as owners of the said land. Following this protest by Odioma community, SHELL promised to contact the Odioma community later. This was in 1998. And up till date, SHELL has not contacted the Odioma community again on the issue of the ownership of Owukubu, so claims the Odioma community.

Also, SHELL did not start work on the said flow station until on the 22 January 2005 when a rig and a houseboat were sent by SHELL to Owukubu to begin construction / drilling. But this angered the Odioma community. They went en mass on 24 January 2005, women and children, to Owukubu and protested that SHELL stops work until Odioma community has been properly consulted and accorded due recognition as the owners of Owukubu. The youths of Odioma occupied the work site, and were only made to leave on 26 January 2005 after the intervention of some military personnel from a nearby community. Work was also suspended by SHELL.

And The Killings Begin

But both Obioku and Bassambiri communities were not happy with the action of Odioma community. Both claimed that Owukubu belongs to them. It is pertinent to note here that Obioku is a satellite community of Bassambiri, although Odioma is making the same claim over Obioku. And Bassambiri is asserting ownership of Owukubu via Obioku. It was alleged that a satellite community of Odioma known as Bolobio was burnt down by suspected youths from Obioku in order to have control over Owukubu. Both Odioma and Obioku were poised for war over the ownership of Owukubu. And Bassambiri was alleged to be in support of the Obioku community.

The situation took a new dimension when 12 persons on a peace mission to Obioku and Odioma were murdered on their way to Obioku from Bassambiri on 3 February 2005. The 12 persons included four Councillors from the Nembe Local Government Area. There were counter-allegations from both Odioma and Bassambiri communities. While many persons from Bassambiri claimed that the 12 persons were killed by indigenes of Odioma community,

Odioma community on the other hand claimed that the Bassambiri community mistakenly killed their own kith and kin. At this point, it was very evident that a war is likely to break out between Odioma and Obioku / Bassambiri. In fact, the waterways between Odioma and Bassambiri were no longer safe for travelling as commuters were harassed and checked at different points community youths on security or vigilante duties.

Attempted Peace Efforts

The Ijaw Youth Council [IYC] sent a peace mission to Odioma and Bassambiri to douse the tension. Both chairmen of Nembe and Brass LGAs invited the chiefs of Odioma and Obioku to Yenagoa for peace talks in which some agreements were reached. The Government also invited a joint force of military personnel comprising navy and army to make the waterways safe, patrol the area in order to prevent a war from broking out.

It was this joint military task force that invaded Odioma community two days later and brought it to rubbles. Four gunboats and ten military shuttle boats were involved in the invasion of Odioma. The Deputy Governor of Bayelsa State, Dr Goodluck Jonathan, stated that the Joint Military Task Force was asked to patrol the area to bring calm to the territory while efforts are being made to fish out the culprits who killed the 12 persons. According to him, the Joint Military Task force was never directed to engage any community in warfare or battle.

A Community In Need

Today, the Odioma community is lying in ruins. And for those who did not escape from the community or had returned, there is no food and water. Most of them do not have a good sleeping place and are crammed into the little available places. Worst still, the Joint military task force has fully occupied the community. It is also feared, according to the Ezekiel Young, a youth leader of Nembe, that the Joint military task force is likely to invade the Ogbolomabiri community too.

CONCLUSION

What has happened to Odioma is another genocide being visited on the Ijaws again. The Nigerian military [including the police] has once displayed its incompetence at tackling crime in our society. While the killing of the councillors and others is condemnable, the wiping out of entire communities is no justice. It is for the same excuse of fishing out criminals that soldiers invaded and destroyed Odi, Ogodobiri, Ogbudugbudu, ETC.

The international community should support the demand for the immediate withdrawal of all military personnel in Odioma and the whole of the Ijaw territory; and the immediate trial of all military personnel involved in these atrocities. Relief materials are urgently needed for the Odioma community. SHELL should be held responsible for the escalation of this crisis. The situation is likely to get worse, for SHELL and the Nigerian economy.

Felix Tuodolo

Emeritus President, Ijaw Youth Council [IYC]

ANNEX 1

Names of Odioma indigenes killed on Saturday

Elder Jermiah Toru

Elder Zagiri

Madam Oroifie

Madam Erefate

Mr. Christopher Charles

Mr. Enenigha Karimie

Mr. Ekinetai Inemi

Yaya Evans

Mr. Daulagha Ebiegberi

Madam Margaret Orumiegha

Miss Ingoba Ebiribo

Miss Tariebi Inemi

Master Erimie Otokolo

Elder Otokolo Kunemo

Mr. Bomo Zagiri

Mr. Sunday Evans

Ebianga Oruama

Erisei Ingo

Okolo Robert

Gbali

Erisei Inie

Miss Ebinabo Karina
Miss Inie fred
Master Moses Frank
Master Smith Silver
Miss Ebiene Gow
Miss Happiness Ingo
Miss Tadaerigha Inemi
Master Friday Mark
Mrs. Ebingo Fred
Mrs. Clara Debo
Mrs. Karina steven
Mrs. Gift Selekuma

Note: The list is still being compiled. The Odioma Youth President and the Odioma Community Spokesperson, Reuben Diepre and Philemon Kelly Dickson supplied these names respectively. Phelimon Dickson was part of the team that accompanied the Deputy Governor of Bayelsa state to visit Odioma on Sunday 20/02/2005.

ANNEX 2

NAMES OF 12 PERSONS KILLED WHILE ON A PEACE MISSION

Hon. Iniebo Chiefson
Hon. Iruosuomoye Okoroma
Hon. Evan Ekosa
Hon. Ingo Tari Sylva
Mrs. Ikaebinyo Eneni
Miss Nyingilayefa Debo
Mr. Erefagha Daulambo
Mr. Lucky Imbe Derri
Mr. Tonworio Godwill Keremah
Mr. Ebimonyu Jeremiah
Mr. Ebi Okuru
The Driver of the boat whose name could not be ascertain for now.
