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Shareholders mobilised to warn Shell

by Bill Bowder

CHURCH shareholders in Shell, the oil giant, are being asked to back a warning to the company not to ride roughshod over local communities in Ireland, Nigeria, and Russia.

The Ecumenical Council for Corporate Responsibility (ECCR), with members from many of Britain's Churches, acted after the imprisonment of five people in County Mayo, Ireland, who objected to Shell's laying a large gas pipe from the Corrib gas field close to their property. They claimed it was unsafe.

ECCR also wants Shell shareholders to challenge the company over not applying its environmental guidelines in Nigeria's Delta basin, and endangering the whaling and fishing industries of Sakhalin (a Russian island the size of England) through pollution. ECCR says Shell has not consulted local groups properly or addressed their grievances. The Delta region of Nigeria is one of the world's biggest suppliers of oil, but remains poor. Armed gangs attack oil installations, and oil is syphoned off and sold abroad.

The ECCR resolution wants Shell shareholders to press for independent assessments of Shell's plans, and for the company to find better ways of getting and refining oil if it does not pass scrutiny. Otherwise, there could be "costly delays to . . . production" ECCR's draft warns.

Shell should act 'for the present and future peace, safety, environment, and prosperity of local communities directly affected by the company's operations', the draft resolution says.

ECCR wants its resolution to be put to the first AGM of the newly formed Royal Dutch Shell plc in May. It urges shareholders to show their support for the move.

The Church of England's Ethical Investment Advisory Group (EIAG) is part of the ECCR. Neville White, a member of EAIG, said on Wednesday it would be up to the three constituent parts of EIAG—the Pensions Board, the Church Commissioners, and the Central Board of Finance—to decide whether to support the resolution.

The Church Commissioners own £65.6-million in Shell shares, according to their last annual report.

Shareholders in Shell who want to co-sponsor the resolution can contact miles.litvinoff@eccr.org.uk.