

Civil society coalition calls for a new compensation body to address oil spills in the Niger Delta

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BP's Gulf of Mexico disaster has heightened international concerns about the environmental dangers of offshore drilling around the world and led to President Obama declaring it America's "environmental 9/11". This oil spill has been correctly identified as a massive emergency and it is time to recognise that the ongoing oil spills, conflict and human rights abuses in the Niger Delta should also be acknowledged as an emergency demanding a concerted international response.

The lack of parity in the levels of response afforded to the US Gulf of Mexico oil spill, when compared to that given to the ongoing devastating spills in the Delta, have prompted us to highlight this situation and call for urgent action by the US, British and Nigerian governments and oil companies including ExxonMobil, Shell and Chevron. As a coalition of leading Nigerian and International human, children and environmental rights groups we are extremely concerned about the impact these spills have on the ability of children and their parents to access their basic human rights. We have witnessed firsthand the suffering that has been caused by these ongoing spills. Like our friends in the USA, we have seen the horrific impact that oil spills have had on the environment and humans' ability to produce the food they need to survive.

However, whilst the American government has secured a \$20 billion package from BP to compensate the communities affected by the Gulf of Mexico spill, communities in the Niger Delta are offered little or no justice. The recent devastating oil spills by ExxonMobil in Akwa Ibom state highlight this case perfectly. Whilst we welcome the Nigeria Oil Spill Response Agency (NOSDRA) taking a greater interest in these recent oil spills, we are calling for urgent action as there is clearly a failure by both regulatory bodies and oil companies to achieve even basic outcomes in response to oil spills and their prevention. When one considers that the ExxonMobil oil spills are just some of an estimated 300 such spills that affect the Niger Delta on average each year, it is clear that this situation cannot be tolerated any more.

We believe that the following steps are needed to address the issues of oil spills and environmental degradation in the Niger Delta:

In the short term:

- Oil companies including ExxonMobil, Shell and Chevron and the Nigerian Government must recognise that the very nature of oil production is a direct risk to the environment. Therefore, it is their responsibility to set aside funds, which can be administered independently, for dealing with oil spills.
- A prompt response mechanism must be established to ensure containment of oil spills and address critical social needs brought about by oil spills.
- All previous and present Environmental Impact Assessments must be made publicly available.
- All the Joint Investigation Team (JIT) reports must be made publicly available.
- Oil companies operating in the Niger Delta must adhere to international standards and change all oil pipelines every 15 years.

In the medium term:

- Post Impact Assessment (PIA) must be carried out and published.
- Photos of oil spills must be publicly published within 48 hrs of the spill.
- Communities should expect a response, within 24 hours, to any reports of oil spills from themselves or others.

In the long term:

- An independent body should be established that is funded through an environment insurance

bond based on an agreed percentage of oil revenue. This body should have the responsibility and resources to identify, respond to, compensate for, clean, remediate and restore oil spill sites. The board of such a body should be cross representational of civil society, government and major oil companies. The body should be based on and uphold international best practice with transparency embedded throughout all tiers of operation.

Signed:

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Stepping Stones Nigeria
Stakeholder Democracy Network, UK/Nigeria
Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organisation, Netherlands
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PLATFORM / remember saro-wiwa, UK
Ecumenical Council for Corporate Responsibility, UK
Justice in Nigeria Now, USA
Bayelsa Union of Great Britain and Ireland (BU)
Nigeria Liberty Forum, UK
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Social Action, Nigeria
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Centre for Social & Corporate Responsibility (CSCR), Nigeria
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The Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP), Nigeria
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