



Niger Delta Civil Society Coalition(NDCSC)



Press Statement

August 10, 2009

NIGER DELTA REGION: YAR'ADUA'S OIL FLOW AMNESTY AGENDA - DISASTER FOR NIGERIA

For the umpteenth time, the Niger Delta Civil Society Coalition wishes to call on the federal executive, national assembly and the entire stakeholders of the region, to see the present opportunity as the ripest moment for a just peace in the Niger Delta, and sustainable stability in Nigeria. The failure to capture this moment, in preference for Mr. President's defective policy of cunning, shall not only spell doom, perhaps the destruction of Nigeria as we know it. And God will not forbid it, because the entire Nigerian leadership that are expected to re-direct Mr. President's derelict militaristic intensions, have either acquiesced or kept numb for purposes of their short-sighted selfish-interests. The House is sinking!

The NDCSC, see in Mr. President's Amnesty Agenda, a desperate measure of a government under enormous pressure, to open the creeks for oil flow, rather than deal holistically with the inequity in the Niger delta, official high level connivance in oil bunkering, unacceptable level of small and light weapons in circulation, and the extraction of sheer criminals within the creeks and outside of it, who have hidden under genuine militant protests. In Mr. President's current policy, the ultimate interests of the generality of the peoples at the receiving end of the age-long injustice in the region does not feature.

Drawing from the ill-advised, ill-conceived bombardment and destruction of Gbaramatu kingdom in May, the continuing gross violations of rights of citizens by the occupation force, the NDCSC strongly believes that the federal government, whose policies in recent times has moved so dramatically from political to a militaristic one, has one short-term object in view: to eclipse the power equation in the region through implosion within the ranks of the militants. This, if it succeeds shall effectively return the region to the status quo: the obnoxious colonial divide and rule policy that have retained the region and its people to what it currently suffers - abject marginalization, poverty in the midst of abundance and

perpetual militarization. The ceding of more decision making powers in recent times to the military, does not and cannot augur well for democracy building and survival in the Nigeria.

The Amnesty Agenda is already succeeding in its very negative essence, by way of placing highest premium on individual militant leaders, over and above the real issues of contention by millions of citizens of the region. The federal government by voiding genuine participatory DDR process as provided in the Niger Delta Technical Committee Report, seem to be saying: as long as oil flows, and revenue levels returns, to hell with the yearning of the peoples of the region. The implosion process seem to be moving so fast with the very quick transformation of 'general' Boyloaf, from a militant general to a political general, so eager to crush anything on his path to please his new found masters.

With this current development, it would not be long before government sharpens its propaganda machine on behalf of oil corporations and huge oil bunkering lobby, once again turning the real issues of the region, to stories of divisions, greed, criminality; and where Niger Delta 'ex-militants' do not only provide the state with needed intelligence, but could be corrupted enough to lead the onslaught against fellow Niger Deltans, while crafty corrupt political leaders and merchants of violence in public and private sector watch in jubilation, as they laugh their way to the banks with the proceeds of blood profits from the region. This can only lead to a more extreme destruction of livelihoods.

The NDCSC, therefore, insist that any agenda of the federal government that does not take a long-term view of an internationally acceptable DDR process, which includes a just peace that is based on sustainable livelihood in the region, reduction of the level of small arms in circulation, punishing merchants of violence, oil bunkerers, ensuring that those who used their official positions to enthrone criminality for their personal selfish profits, are made to face the law of the land, then whatever Mr. President intends to achieve in his ill-conceived amnesty shall be short-lived.

The NDCSC, wishes to inform Mr. President and the Nigerian people, including the international community, that the DDR process that the Niger Delta Technical Committee recommended did not envisage an arm buy-back strategy. This strategy according to series of well documented case studies consulted across the globe, is known to had not only failed, but worsened conflict situations, as those who received huge sums of money rearmed themselves with more modern sophisticated weapons of human destruction. Nigeria also witnessed the same effect a couple of years ago, when former governor of Rivers State, Dr. Peter Odili engaged in same most corrupt avenue of arms buy-back from same militants during his long years of horror. This strategy is known to have added to worsening situation in the region today, as non-violent oriented youths were motivated into violence by the enormous sums of monies that Alhaji Asari Dokubo and others received during the failed process.

The NDCSC wishes to remind those willing to collect money for amnesty, that such corrupt move, automatically turns them from what they had claimed they were into sheer common criminals, who may live an 'unfree' life for the rest of their lives, as they would remain under constant watch. It is therefore, critical that stakeholders urge for a participatory dialogue that produces a just peace for the people of the region, who have not only been at the receiving end from the federal government, but from some real and unreal militants who turned their weapons on unsuspecting citizens, communities, to a large extent trapping their political economic and social freedoms as well. Only a just peace could reconcile the people and the federal government, and by extension, militants. Eventual forgiveness for all manners of perpetrations shall derive from just peace, not self aggrandizement.

The NDCSC categorically wishes to make it absolutely known that the current Amnesty process is not working and may not work at all by reason of its deceptive foundation. The governors who went on rampage recently did so to seek relevance and legitimacy, not a show of real leadership. They watched a fast evolving situation in the region, inspite of them, and wanted to buy into it through the back door. It would have been a welcome development if they were a serious bunch; those who congratulated them, did so out of sheer emotion, having not seen any results. That has remained our waterloo in the region.

Finally, the NDCSC wishes to reiterate to the federal government, that there are enormous risks in not involving a real third party mediator and negotiating. A refusal to engage in talks and continue to treat this issue as a 'law and order' experiment may strengthen extremists by showing that nonviolent means offer no hope. It is noteworthy that some of those who are engaged in the current insurgency sprang from moderate movements that encountered only government repression, absolute corruption of the region's governors and others. A refusal to talk may thus discourage new leaders who might otherwise have preferred peaceful means of change, thereby surging up the strength of militants. It is noteworthy that Hamas and other Islamists, for example, historically gained more support when peace talks were foundering. Similarly, a massive insurgency in Algeria began after the military government refused to recognize that Islamists had won elections and thus deserved power. There are many other examples.

Government efforts to split militants and wean those eager to collect money and leave the creeks may succeed somewhat, but enough hardcore members may remain that at least some violence will continue, and there may be a shift to more extreme violence. Many members of M-19 in Columbia turned away from bloodshed, but a violent fringe remained. Insurgency presents more of a political threat than terrorism; many citizens find the possibility of terrorism in previously safe cities more daunting than the reality of a bloodier guerrilla war near a remote creek or faraway Niger Delta region. The recent attack of an oil installation in Lagos is very instructive.

The NDCSC calls on the federal government to stop its current policy framework in the region, that have abysmally failed, and do what for them, has been unthinkable - bring forth a third party mediator that would make genuine dialogue possible, not the current privatized and individualistic corrupt arrangements. Genuine dialogue is critically necessary to end this conflict and transform insurgents into legitimate political actors or wean them all away, not some, from violence, so that ordinary citizens and aliens alike throughout the region may know peace and human security. This requires expertise and political dexterity, a long-term view that accepts the possibility of real change. A policy that takes into cognisance the departure of the military on the streets, nooks and crannies of the region, is what can work. On the other hand, a policy that envisages a permanent militarization, and its attendant gross violations of human rights of citizens of the region in the name of oil passage, cannot be for a just peace, and cannot endure.

Signed:

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