

**STATEMENT BY LEDUM MITEE, MOSOP PRESIDENT, ON THE OCCASION OF THE  
15TH Ogoni HEROES' DAY ON 10TH NOVEMBER 2010**

Each year we gather on this day to remember the sacrifices that Ken Saro-Wiwa, Chief Edward Kobani, Albert Badey, Chief Samuel Orage, John Kpuinen, Chief Theophilus Orage, Dr. Barinem Kiobel, Daniel Gbokoo, Baribor Bera, Paul Levura, Nordu Eawo, Felix Nuate, Saturday Dobee and several others made to ensure our survival. As our struggle has increasingly become a metaphor for the struggle for justice, along with these heroes, this year's remembrance therefore is specially dedicated to non Ogonis who helped and gave their lives in the struggle that focused the world's attention not only to the problems of Ogoni and the Niger Delta region but also to the strive for justice and democracy in our country. We notably remember today Chief Gani Fawehinmi, Anita Roddick of the Body Shop and other compatriots in the struggle for freedom.

This is a period for some sober reflection. It is important that we reflect on the sacrifices of these heroes, not only for us who were their compatriots but more especially for those who were pretty young when the sacrifices were made. This generation of our people, some of whom were probably in nursery and primary schools fifteen years ago, are now adults, but may not have felt the imperatives of the struggle. Our reflection should remind us and this generation, that confronted with threats to our very survival, we had looked oppression in the face, aware of the obvious dangers, and said **'NO' to environmental oppression, economic strangulation and political marginalization and manipulation.**

We need to remind ourselves and this generation of our youth that our heroes and us squarely considered and rejected other options in preference for non-violence. Our preference for non-violence was not an act of cowardice or weakness but consciously driven by the Ogoni belief that spilling blood contaminates a struggle and our firm belief in the ultimate triumph of non-violence.

Today, 20 years after the launch of the Ogoni Bill of Rights and 15 years after our non-violent leaders were violently murdered, even those who yesterday were

advocates of the violent approach, including those who derided our methods, have now come to accept that non-violence works after all!

The gains of non-violence may be slow but they are certain and enduring. Today, it is a fitting tribute to the memory of our heroes and our steadfastness with non-violence that we continued to sustain the struggle against the devastation of our physical environment by the activities of Shell. When we as a people, in a united voice, said 'NO TO SHELL', the spirits of Ogoni equally said 'NO'. Today, I have the feeling, nay the conviction, that our heroes would undoubtedly be pleased that we have changed the trend of local and national discourse from Shell's return to Ogoni to who would take over from them and under what conditions. Whilst many who used violence have not succeeded in sending Shell or any oil company from their land, we have succeeded! Non-violence works after all!

As you are all aware, I chaired a Committee to help proffer a road map for the resolution of the Niger Delta problem. Amongst the recommendations of my Committee, was that a new town be built in each of the Niger Delta States. I am pleased to say on this occasion that the Federal Government has now approved a new town to be built in Ogoni, and as we speak, the perimeter survey for the acquisition of the parcel of land for the new town is being completed between Nyokuru and Beerli communities. Non-violence works after all!

Even as we savour in our little victories, I urge that we must continue to be vigilant over our rights. Shell's intrigues are very well known to our people, even when they work through agents. In this respect, our determination to see to the remediation of our environment has not blinded us to accept fraudulent practices, no matter how well dressed. We had, from its inception, robustly engaged the United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP) initiative originally designed to do a study of the Ogoni environment to determine what remediation measures would be adequate. As we considered that our priority as a people lies not only in some mere sterile exercise in studies unrelated to actual clean-up, we raised our concerns about this as well as lack of known United Nations' standards of genuine community consultations. When we observed with utmost regret that instead of addressing these concerns, the project continued to

be run within the framework of the dubious Rev. Fr. Kukah initiative with the result that it is not transparent, afflicted with stage-managed (interim) results of so-called investigations and lack of any discernable links with actual clean-ups as recommended by the Federal government, MOSOP has withdrawn its support for the current UNEP initiative, until such a time when the right things are done. Our leaders did not pay the supreme sacrifices for us to accept substandard practices. The Ogoni people acknowledge with immense gratitude the support we have received from the international community including UN agencies, but reject a lowered 'Nigerian' version of UN standards.

Beyond the physical environment, our heroes envisioned a political environment in which we would not be marginalized or oppressed. That is why our solidarity song urges us to "Arise, Study, Work, Struggle and Unite, (so that) we shall not be oppressed anymore!" In accordance with the overwhelming wishes of our people, as you are all aware, we have commenced the constitutional processes for the actualization of the request for the creation of a Bori State and it is encouraging to let you know that three (3) out of the six (6) constitutional huddles required for the exercise have been satisfied by the Bori State request. By the time the next Parliament is in place, we shall embark on the next more crucial stages for the realization of this vision. It is my belief that if we muster the same courage and resources, marshalled against the military for this Bori State venture, we certainly will succeed.

In this regard, as the exercise would undoubtedly require the strong commitments of our elected representatives, we must be prepared to ensure that only credible candidates are elected. This casts a responsibility on those who are responsible for choosing candidates for nomination by the various political parties to use only competence and overall interest of our people as the main considerations for their choices. In the struggle against political oppression, we must stand up against politics of thuggery, of ordination/imposition of candidates and of rigging. This has been a lone and unsuccessful task in the past as we faced systematic rigging of elections. This time, we have an INEC and a government that have pledged their commitment to give us an opportunity to chart a different and more democratic path. This is laudable and refreshing but it will mean nothing

unless ordinary people mobilize at the grassroots to defend their rights to vote and their votes.

To start with, we as a people must in turn fully participate in the voters' registration exercise slated for January to acquire our first tools for making our votes count. We are starting from a terribly low point where most people here have probably never seen their votes properly counted in an election since 1999. This means we cannot expect dramatic change overnight but we must start now and we must not allow scepticism or apathy to weaken our resolve. Even if there are setbacks in 2011 we must understand that we should remain determined to chart a path towards representation where the voice of our communities is clearly heard. It is important for our Ogoni politicians to understand that we have no issue with any individual. However, we expect all our politicians to recognize that the seasons are changing. We will expect that in the coming months all our representatives and aspirants demonstrate visible commitments to the welfare of Ogoni people. This also means facing the people. In the past, candidates who have been confident of party power have been reluctant to face the people and explain their manifestos. We hope those days are past, as we call on the Ogoni people to reject any candidate who does not come home and explain comprehensively what he or she will do to represent our people.

Finally on elections, I should add that it is time that we as a people considered our commitments to equality by electing capable women to the various tiers of government. I call on all political parties to correct the gender imbalance in representation but not to do so in a tokenistic way as I look forward to seeing women who know the needs of our communities entering into office in 2011.

Before I end, let me say that for me personally, and for most of you here today, this should not just be a time to reflect on what would have been on this day 15 years ago, but where we as a people and a nation would have been if the peaceful methods we stood and stand for were embraced and supported. Preference and reward for violent behaviour have set the hands of our regional and national clock several decades back. The rate at which disagreements, within and between our communities, our region and our nation easily express themselves in violence of

unimaginable proportions, is a sad commentary on our state of development. Kidnapping, political assassination and destruction of property at the slightest provocation rearing their ugly heads in our communities under the guise of inter or intra community disagreements must receive our collective condemnation. MOSOP is poised to work in the days ahead with the relevant security agencies and community leaders to flush out the bad eggs amongst us who perpetrate these vices before further damage is done to our hard earned image.

Let me end by reiterating the fact that the leaders we remember today toiled to ensure the enthronement of democracy and freedom in our country. Today we pride ourselves as being in a democracy, but democracy is not just all about elections. It is the tolerance of opposing views without recourse to violence that is the most important attribute of democracy. We owe it to their memory to replace the sham democracy we witness nowadays with genuine democracy. We no longer must shy away from reality for it has become our national tragedy, nowadays to use euphemisms to cover our failures to confront reality. 'Bribery' is now 'settlement', 'sycophancy' is 'loyalty', 'examination malpractice', 'sorting' whilst in some cases outright 'terrorism' is given a political garb! The lesson of the MOSOP struggle which the heroes we are remembering today bequeathed to us and which we offer to the nation and our region, is that we must call a spade by its real name by distinguishing between genuine community agitations on the one hand and criminality, and even terrorism, on the other, and respond to them as they respectively deserve. That is the best tribute to the memory of our heroes.

End.

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