

THE NIGER DELTA AND HUMAN RIGHTS IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

The Niger Delta Region in the enclave called Nigeria today has been terribly locked in an endless battle for its Human Rights which also includes the right to development and economic autonomy, with various predatory institutions which have across time, relentlessly sought to command its immense natural wealth and dictate to it the terms and manner of development it must follow. The world conference on Human Rights held in Vienna, Austria recognized the fact that development rights are arguably fundamental and inalienable rights. The recognition of the right to development and the meeting of basic economic and social needs as part of fundamental human rights by the conference marked a turning point in the United Nations recognition of only Civil rights as fundamental human rights. This paper takes a look at the Niger Delta, its problems of human rights to which development rights is a part and contends that the Niger Delta development rights must be promoted and defended at all cost on the basis of proper understanding of the institutionalization of a transparent and genuine democracy.

Key Words:

•Niger Delta •human rights •development •resource control •Nigeria •fundamental rights •international law

Introduction

The goose that lays the golden egg for the country Nigeria is the Niger Delta which is endowed with natural resources, especially oil, in very large quantities. The Niger Delta covers about 70,000 square kilometres and is widely acclaimed to constitute the largest wetland in the African continent. It is composed of four main ecological zones which are coastal Barrier Island, mangrove fresh water, swamp forest and lowland rain forest. It is believed that beneath most of these lies the treasure base of Nigeria, the sites from where millions of barrels of Crude oil are extracted daily for the survival of our country. The extraction of billions of barrels of crude oil from of this area over the years has made Nigeria to be recognized as one of the world's leading petroleum provinces. Nigeria today is the world's sixth largest producer of crude oil. This feat is achieved at the expense and grave cost to the people and environment of the Niger Delta. Rather than being a blessing to the people of the Niger Delta, it has presumably turned out to be a curse to them. The Niger Delta has become one of the most prominently featured topical issues (positively or negatively) on almost every lip as a result of the discovery of oil in large quantities in the region. Since the discovery, Nigeria has depended almost solely on oil for its revenue. Presently, without exaggeration, oil accounts for about 95% of the Nigerian Federal Government foreign exchange receipts. The implementation and successes of development plans, annual budgets, other project and programmes depend on the oil fortune.

On the other, in Nigeria's political economy, the supposedly 'blessed Niger Delta' has assumed a high degree of negative connotation for some obvious reasons. The wealth or natural endowment of the region has become a source of its greatest undoing. Rather than enjoy the benefits of oil exploitations, its lot is negative externalities of oil production which expresses themselves in internal colonization or re-colonization of the Niger Deltans by the major ethnic groups, which control state apparatuses, violation of their human rights, truncation of the regions path to growth, underdevelopment, militarization of the area, destruction of the ecosystem, alienation, denial of certain sensitive positions in the polity, youth restiveness and militancy arising from indignation, disarticulation of its century-old socio-economic structure etc. (Anele and Omoro 2009:52).

Niger Delta Region before Oil Discovery

Succinctly, it is true that before the discovery of oil and its subsequent elevation as the main commanding height of the Nigerian economy, the Niger Delta people and the region were relatively calm and peaceful. There was harmony and peaceful coexistence among the people of the region.

The yield and benefits from the exploitation of the natural environment was adequate for the subsistence and commercial needs of the people. Even with the coming of the early Europeans and contact with them, the various forms of trade engaged by the people of the Niger Delta region depicted an intimate knowledge of commerce and industry in their own peculiar way. This does not, however, mean that there were no pockets of skirmishes here and there among the people as conflict is endemic in the nature of man. The bottom-line is that the Niger Delta people lived in relative harmony with their environment and with each other.

It will be interesting for us to know that after the discovery of Crude Oil reserves in the Niger Delta region in 1956 or thereabout, the Niger Delta people have known no peace again. The serenity that hitherto characterized the area began to gradually evaporate and the dark clouds of the curse of “Crude Oil” began to envelop the Niger Delta region. (Niger Delta News 2008:1). Millions of barrels of liquid gold have been extracted from under their feet which make plenty of money for the country and also performs abracadabra in various other ways for Nigeria, some individuals, multinational corporations and even neighbouring countries. Yet the Niger Delta people swim in the ocean of abject poverty. They live in darkness yet the oil extracted from under their feet is used to generate electricity. The substance that would have given them so much joy has only brought so much pain, suffering and death. Only a handful of the Niger Delta people work in oil companies because a large majority have been isolated from centres of education.

Sometimes there are oil spillages covering the rivers and creeks and deprives them of drinking water and their age long occupation of fishing; sometimes, the oil spills on the land depriving the people the people of vital land for farming. In the words of the Niger Delta News “they see the devil's fire that burns day and night from huge furnaces that shoot into the sky as an inexplicable albatross”.

Beautiful cities with good road networks, magnificent structures, good drinking water etc. have been built with the proceeds of the millions of

barrels of crude oil extracted from the region that caused them pain and suffering. Others living in the same country with them have access to education and the people of the Niger Delta begin to wonder why they have been left behind holding the short end of the stick. This is a violation of their human rights and needs to be seriously addressed especially in a democracy.

Framework for Analysis

The point of departure for analysis in this paper will be couched on the premises that the perceived imbalances within the Nigerian Federal political structure contributed fundamentally to the atmosphere of hostility and mutual suspicion among the various components which make up the Federation. The situation in the Niger Delta is symptomatic of what has been referred to as 'Criminal Social neglect and ecological degradation' (Musa 1999 in Adedeji 2005:16) and the violation of the human rights of the Niger Delta people. The end result is that the region which is responsible for about 95% of the country's income displays a degree of penury and poverty which stands in sharp contrast and contradiction to the wealth it produces. This situation has led to a militarized youth population which has been known to kidnap oil workers, and defy security agencies using their knowledge of the localities and their access to small arms/light weapons to drive home their point of emancipating the Niger Delta from the shackles of internal colonization of the Niger Delta people from the Nigerian State.

Immeasurable damage and untold harm has been done to the Niger Delta people and the environment by the actions and activities of the extractive industries. Various governments of the Nigerian states had repeatedly shown themselves to be hopelessly incapable of intervening to protect the human and environment rights of the people of the region because of the romance with and strong alliance between state official and the extractive industries. As a result, the companies get away unscathed with their atrocities against the Niger Delta people.

On another note, conflict and insecurity situation has become worse with the handing over of Administrative baton from the military to the civilians in 1999. several studies have shown a general agreement that at the base of the crises are the socio-economic and ecological effects of oil and gas production, corruption by public officials with impunity, poverty in the

midst of monumental wealth, developmental neglect experiences by the people and the military approach adopted by the Nigerian Federal Government to quell the genuine agitations of the Niger Deltans. The people of the region were incidentally the dividends and humaneness of democracy is yet to be felt and seen at the doorsteps of the Niger Delta region. The genuine expectation of the people regarding democracy focus principally on the alleviation of poverty and the provision of infrastructure including roads, water, hospitals, electricity and employment for their youths as unemployed is also incredibly high in the region (Nsirimovu 2005 p. 157).

Human Rights: Conceptualization

In the attempt to conceptualize what human rights are, it will be pertinent for us to have at least a working idea of what rights are in any given society. Rights, as defined by the chambers Twentieth Century Dictionary, could be regarded as “a just or legal claim; what one has a just claim to, a due”, simply meaning a legally justified claim. It then follows that, a right can be sufficed to mean a due, or an interest recognized and protected by the law or some other norm in a society. In this case, a right may be moral, religious, social or cultural, but is legal, only when the law, beyond recognition procures its protection and enforcement. Hohfeld contended that such protected rights will include liberty, power, immunity and claim. In Hohfeld's assertion, we have a right when others have no authority or justifiable right to affect us (Liberty), for example freedom of movement.

When others are duty bound to obey or respect our bidding or command (power) for example depository rights of will making. When others are helpless or powerless over us (immunity) and when others are legally liable to us and our will (claim/right, for example right to life or property) which others must respect (Hohfeld, 1923:38).

Wokocha (2002:15) in harmony with the Hohfeldian theory explained that:

“Each of these categories or varieties of right, signify a character of the aggregate of the legal positions we refer to as right and each of them represents a position which the law will respect and protect as legal right. While liberty and immunity are defensive claims, power and claim are offensive or positive claims which the bearer can enforce against others.

So long as we have not been disqualified by any impediments of legal nature, these rights can be exercised and enforced at the courts of law.”

Wokocha concluded his understanding of a right from the legal prospective when he said that

“Where a right is not justifiable as in cases where the law creates a duty on government but confers no right of action on citizens, such legal provisions should however function as defences to charges of breach of public or duties, which may arise in event of a citizen taking advantage of the constitutional directives to the government in ordering his life, conduct or business to his development advantage” (*Ibid*).

This paper has made an effort to make the layman have a brief insight of what a right is to enable him grasp and understand the concept as applicable in his society. Let us now turn to the concept of Human Rights and see how we can relate it to the Niger Delta Region in Nigeria.

Definitional Attempt

According to the Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary, human right is “one of the basic rights that everyone has to be fairly treated and not in a cruel way, especially by their government” (p.730). The concept of Human Rights is significant in the development of our contemporary world.

Fundamental mental human rights, as it is popularly called are basic or natural or inalienable rights which a state accords each individual residing within its jurisdiction, irrespective of his race, religion colour, place of birth, sex, political affiliation etc and which in the modern state of today's world are embodied in its constitution or in its laws. Human rights are therefore, privileges or prerogatives conferred on each individual or group by state laws and by usage which must be protected. Today almost every modern constitution including Nigeria contains some formal guarantees of civil rights.

Although there are some forms of disparity in the level of sincerity with which these rights are genuinely protected by different countries, for the first time in man's history, Human kind made a legendary attempt to give an unprecedented, irreducible and non-negotiable universal standard by defining the rights of the individual irrespective of gender, race, language and religion.

Ranny (1975 p. 528) remarked that “the mere presence of formally guaranteed rights in any nation's constitution means at least that the framers for whatever reason, deemed it desirable to pay at least lip service and perhaps more to the idea of the rights of man.”

In conceptualizing human rights Obaseki (1992p.246-247)

“Human rights have been variously described as the rights of man or fundamental freedoms. They are claimed and asserted as those which should be or sometimes stated to be those which are legally recognized and protected for each individual the fullest and freest development of personality and spiritual moral and other independence. They are conceived as rights inherent in individuals as rational free willing creatures, not conferred by some positive law or capable of being abridged by positive law.”

According to Osita (1984p.5), Human Rights represents

“Demands or claims which individuals or groups make on society, some of which are protected by law and have become part of *lex lata* while others remain aspirations to be attained in the future”.

Cranston in Daudu (2005p.55) in his own way defines Human Rights as

“Something of which no one may be deprived without a great affront to justice. There are certain deeds which should never be done, certain freedoms which should never be invaded, some things which are suppressively sacred.”

The definitions of Human Rights can go on and on but from the foregoing definitions, we can safely arrive at the conclusion that Human Rights are inalienable rights that belong to the individual by virtue of his existence as a human being which shall be granted and guaranteed to everyone.

We can also infer summarily that while Human Rights can be geared from constitutionally guaranteed freedoms, the contents of the rights continuously increases to meet societal and individual aspirations.

Historically, the conception of Human rights can be traced to the idea of natural law which were developed by the early Greek philosophers and the social contract theorists like John Locke, Jean Jacque Rosseau and

Thomas Hobbes among other. These early philosophers contended that obedience to the government is based on the fact that men willingly came together in Civil Societies and formed governments for one special reason and that is the mutual preservation of their lives, liberties and estates which naturally belong to all men simply because they are human beings. They also strongly argued, especially John Locke, that whenever a government fails to preserve these rights and thereby ceases to serve the end for which it was created, the people have the rights and even a duty to rebel and replace it (Anifowose and Enemu, 1999p.147).

The standard for the recognition of human rights was codified in the United Nations International Bill of Rights in 1945 at the end of the second-world war and the coming into existence of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women. The declaration is a formal document adopted by the UN General Assembly setting forth the basic rights of people throughout the world. It sets a common standard of achievement for all people and all nations. The declaration states that all persons are born free and equal in dignity and rights.

The contrary is the case in Nigeria as all people are not equal in dignity and rights as regards the Niger Delta people. The Niger Delta Region is arguably considered to be one of the richest in terms of natural resources in the world and yet it is tragic to note that the people of the region are clearly one of the poorest people on earth. The reason is not far fetched; the government of Nigeria is controlled by the majority whereas the Niger Delta people are minority. A country like Nigeria where the various military and civilian regimes perpetrate injustice with impunity, the policy of anybody in power is how to exploit to the maximum without making any returns. In the words of Professor Sagay in Niger Delta News (2008p.7).

“They see the Niger Delta as a source of wealth and the people of the Niger Delta as obstacle, as a problem which is preventing them from getting all that wealth without anybody saying anything. And Infact, if they could find a way of gathering all of us together and resettling us somewhere they would gladly to that”.

The various governments in Nigeria have not taken to seriously consider, until recently because of strong protest from the Niger Delta people, the conditions or situations of the Niger Delta people whose 'God given' natural resources are been extracted. For this apollyn situation, Professor Sagay further remarked that

“If you look at the Federal Government and the Oil and Gas Companies.... Nobody considers the plight of those from whose soil and water that they are extracting these resources from. It is a question of power in an unjust environment in a continent where injustice reigns supreme and man's inhumanity to man is the order of the day.”

The government of Nigeria has used one draconian law or the other to steal the resources of the Niger Delta people, to kill which violates their right to life, dehumanize and disdain the people, destroy and deface their environment which is also an infringement on the right to exist as a people in a conducive environment.

Ogbuigwe (1999p.93-94) once remarked that “almost all the regimes both civilian and military have waged a despicable war against the Delta, their weapon, the law and the gun their loot- the Delta and its resources”. Some repressive laws against the Niger Delta people include: The Petroleum Act, Oil Terminal Dues Act, Associated Gas Re-injection Act, and Land Use Act among others.

What are These Rights?

There are four major types of Rights found in contemporary constitutions. They are distinguishable as civil rights, political rights, economic, social and cultural rights and legal rights.

Civil Rights: These are concerned with the protection of the individual and include the right to life, personal freedom and security, freedom from torture, in human treatment, slavery, forced labour and imprisonment for debt, freedom of choice, the right to fair trial, and freedom from deprivation of property without adequate compensation.

Political Rights: These are rights which guarantee individual participation in politics, that is, citizen's participation in the government of the state. These include freedom to vote and be voted, equality before the law, right to criticize the government, recognition as a person before the law and unimpeded access to the courts of law.

Economic, Social and Cultural Rights: These are rights concerned with economic and socio-cultural needs of individuals. By their nature these rights can only be realizable after the government has provided the

necessary facilities or infrastructures for them. These rights are contingent upon the availability of resources, facilities and so on and finally facilities which are obligatory on government to provide. These rights include the right to work; the right to just and favourable conditions of service including fair or maximum living; equal pay for equal work and holidays with pay. The right to form and join trade unions including the right to strike, the right to social security, the right to an adequate standard of living, including suitable and adequate food and housing, adequate and self-fulfilling leisure and the continuous improvement of living conditions; free health and medical service; the right to education, the right to full employment and security and security of employment or unemployment benefits/welfare, the right to permanent employment in the public services and the right to participate in cultural life and enjoy to enjoy the full benefits of scientific and technological progress.

Legal Rights: Rights which relate to material law guarantees for the protection of public institution or the legal order. Legal rights include: The right to marry and found a family; the right to the child or children arising from marriage; the right to privacy in the family; the protection of the family including special assistance for mother and children.

Legal rights also pertain to rights regulating church-state relationships and the autonomy of states in a federation. These rights are entitlements which the state accords its citizens without discrimination as to sex, place of birth, colour or creed. Rights must be provided and safe guarded by the law of the land.

An addendum to the four types of rights above will be development rights. This is because the world conference on Human rights held in Vienna, Austria recognized the fact that development rights are arguably fundamental and inalienable rights. The recognition of the right to development and the meeting of basic social and economic needs as part of fundamental human rights by the conference marked a turning point in the United Nations recognition of only Civil Rights as fundamental human rights (William 1994p.122).

The Nigerian constitution under chapter IV enumerates the following as fundamental rights:

- a) Right to life
- b) Right to dignity
- c) Right to personal liberty

- d) Right to fair hearing
- e) Right to compensation for property compulsorily acquired
- f) Right to private and family life
- g) Right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion
- h) Right to freedom of expression
- i) Right to peaceful assembly and association
- j) Right of freedom of movement
- k) Right to freedom from discrimination on the grounds of ethnic group, place of origin, circumstances of birth, sex, religion, or political opinion.

Other rights under the fundamental objectives and directive principles of state policy provided under chapter II of the constitution include:

- i) Free and compulsory education
- ii) Adequate health care, gainful employment
- iii) Shelter, food etc (source: National Human Rights commission).

These stated rights in the Nigerian constitution are in consonance with the four types of rights earlier highlighted above.

Human Rights: The Niger Delta Experience

The trampling on or the violation of some of the rights of the Niger Delta people as human beings did not start today in Nigeria. Historically speaking, it started with the injustice of colonialism. Colonialism perpetrated and created an unequal exchange between the people of the Niger Delta and the colonialists. The colonial system introduced and instituted a kind of master-servant relationship between external dominant forces and the local inhabitants which gradually eroded the fundamental rights of the Niger Delta people. As Nigeria gained independence, the system adopted by the outsiders was carried over to the post independence period by Nigerians creating a feeling of internal colonialism between the minority Niger Delta and the majority ethnic groups that controlled the instrument of power. This predicament of the Niger Delta has its roots in the 1950s but became very pronounced in the late 1960s when oil assumed a dominant posture in the Nigerian political economy. This combination of complimentary and inter-related colonialism, driven by petroleum continues to haunt the Niger Delta (International IDEA, 2000:240).

From all indications from the discussions so far made, it is crystal clear that one of the major causes of the Niger Delta crisis is the brazen violation of some, if not all of the human rights of the Niger Delta people by the Nigerian State because of their rich mineral resources, especially oil.

It is inviolably obligatory on the part of the Nigerian government to protect the rights of the Niger Delta people as free citizens but these have not been done by successive governments where lip service is the order of the day. Rather there is recourse to draconian and dictatorial laws and the use of security agents to suppress government's injustices protested against by the Niger Delta people. The natural resources including oil, in the Niger Delta region belong to the Niger Delta people as their property. But the Nigerian State has used repressive laws like the land use Act, Petroleum Act, Inland Waterways Act among others to deprive the Niger Delta people of their rights to property, life and liberty and even equality before the law. The Niger Delta people are not equal with others in the eyes of the Nigerian law with the inhuman treatment they have received from the various successive governments.

The enthronement of democracy (that is the restoration of civilian rule) in Nigeria has not seen a reduction of human rights violation in the country's oil producing regions even though the location and types of abuse have changed to some extent as observed by Human Rights watch. Human rights watch strongly criticized the Nigerian Civilian administration for continuing human rights violations in the Niger Delta. The group has contended that there is no human rights progress in the Niger Delta. Protesters for their rights in the oil regions of Nigeria are often subjected to lethal force. Soldiers, naval personnel and paramilitary, mobile police deployed across the Niger Delta carryout summary executions, assaults and other abuses on an ongoing basis. Nor have security forces been punished for the deeds of the past.

In December, 1999, soldiers killed hundreds of people in retaliation for the deaths of twelve policemen during an army assault on the community of Odi in Bayelsa State. No one has been prosecuted in connection with these atrocities committed against unarmed civilians (Human Rights Watch 2000:1). This gives a clear picture of the violation of human rights, especially the right to life, right to peaceful assembly and the right to fair hearing of the Niger Delta people as embedded in the Nigerian Constitution.

The right to life, property, natural resources, oil and gas, conducive environment, continental shelves are all violated with ignominy.

Another area where there is serious infringement on the rights of the Niger Delta people is the area of oil exploration and exploitation with its negative side effects on the people and the region.

When pollution occurs, individuals, families and communities are affected in various ways – loss of land, destruction of crops, destruction of fish ponds, economic trees, health problems, and lots of damage to landed property etc. Ebeku (1998: 60) remarked that “by far the single most important source of pollution in Nigeria is Oil”.

The extraction and exploitation of oil has had damaging effects on the environment of the Niger Delta in Nigeria. The irony of the whole scenario of oil production is that there is little to show in terms of development of the communities from which the oil that has kept Nigeria alive is exploited despite decades of oil production. Equality and efficiency which are the primary objectives of revenue allocation and the use of revenue allocation to redress the obvious imbalances has been absent. Instead of practising fiscal federalism in the true sense of federalism, what we have had in Nigeria has been fiscal centralism in the 'Federal Government' with of course the corresponding excessive dependence of the states and peoples. The horrendous environmental damage to the land, water systems and fisheries and the accompanying poverty to the oil producing companies continued with reckless abandon.

The treatment of derivation has been very defective, its inadequacies is the real problem. The idea of giving 13% or 15% oil revenue to the oil producing areas is meant to be the minimum, because this percentage cannot deal with the horrendous environmental damages in those areas in terms of catering for their development. In principle, this could be raised. But experience has shown that this cannot be increased easily. In the absence of such increase, the people of the Niger Delta region, especially the oil producing communities continue to suffer ecological damage, poverty and remain the least developed areas. This is a violation of their developmental rights. This has resulted to the high level of crisis that we have noticed in recent times (IHRHL: 2).

It is strongly argued in the Niger Delta that with the inherent defects of derivation, fiscal federalism should mean area or states where these mineral resources are obtained should control such resources and pay royalties or taxes that would be agreed upon, to the Federal Government to enable it

cater for its national development objectives. Resource control is an inalienable right in federations. But the contrary is the case in Nigeria where the right to control resources of the Niger Delta by its people has been politicized.

The Niger Delta people have a right to control their resources and development as declared by the United Nations. The United Nations Declaration on Permanent Sovereignty over Natural Resources Provides that:

“The rights of people and nations to permanent sovereignty over their natural wealth and resources must be exercised in the interest of their national development and of the well being of the people of the state concerned” (Article 1).

“Violation of the right of people and nations to sovereignty over their natural wealth and resources is contrary to the spirit and principles of the charter of the United Nations and hinders the development of international co-operation and the maintenance of peace.” (Article 7 in Wokocha 2002:17-18)

1)The right to development is an inalienable human right by virtue of which every human person and all peoples are entitled to participate in, contributing to and enjoying economic, social, cultural and political development, in which all human rights and fundamental freedoms can be fully realised.

2)The Human right to development also implies the full realization of the right to the relevant provisions to both international conventions on human rights, the exercise of their inalienable right to full sovereignty over their natural resources. (Art. 3(1)).

The Niger Delta people are not exempted from the above declarations as they fall within the meaning of those expressions in international law and Municipal law. The Niger Deltans are therefore entitled to the rights, protections and guarantees so clearly emphasized above.

Conclusion

Through this discourse we have come to identify the Niger Delta region as one of the world's wetlands covering about 70,000 square kilometres at the Southern part of the country. Much of it is covered by mangrove forest with marshy areas rich in mineral resources which has attracted the exploration and exploitation of its resources. We also discovered that these

rich natural resources became the greatest undoing of the Niger Delta people.

The paper in passim looked at Rights which is seen as a legally justified claim protected by law, also the concept of Human Rights was discussed. The discussion made us understand that Human rights are rights naturally accruable to every person by virtue of his existence as a human being. These human rights were discussed in relation to the Niger Delta, it was tragically discovered that the rights of the people of Niger Delta have been violated on a continuous basis with the help of some repressive laws by the Nigerian State where they were excluded from taking part in making decisions that affect their lives and well being.

In a democracy, no peace can last or ought to last which does not recognize and accept the principle that government derive their just powers from the consent of the governed and that no right anywhere exists to hand peoples about from sovereignty to sovereignty (Wilson in Gardiner 1965:81). The Niger Delta people had been tossed with rough wind here and there and their rights violated for too long with frivolous and bogus promises by different administrations in Nigeria. As a result, the people of the region faint with fear for the unknown future for them unless the dictatorial repressive laws which infringes on their rights are sincerely repealed or abrogated and their rights protected and guaranteed for them to have faith in Nigeria.

We live in a world of peoples. In recognition of this fact the world is more and more ready to recognize that the rights of the individual human being are a matter of concern, not only domestically, but for the entire international community. The achievements of human rights to date constitute a delicate and fragile trend which needs to be supported by faith in human values, it is altruistic that we are undoubtedly witnessing the birth of a new consciousness concerning the Niger Delta issue; a new conscience which will seek to protect and advance the well being of the Niger Delta people. It is believed and hoped that the concern and struggle for a better deal for the Niger Delta region, in the near future, should depend not just on public opinion in this country, but on opinion at the whole world.

The struggle for basic human rights for Niger Delta must seek to actualise not only the right to participate in the government process and the basic freedoms of association, conscience, expression and so on but also access by all the people of the Niger Delta to the basic necessities of life such

as food, clothing, shelter, health care, education, employment etc. it is only when the Niger Delta enjoys the right to exist in dignity, that is, freedom from poverty, inhuman treatment, that the enjoyment of civic, socio-economic and political rights can be meaningful to them as human beings and citizens of Nigeria.

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