

**TEXT OF PRESS ADDRESS BY THE IJAW YOUTH COUNCIL (IYC) AT
THE AFTERMATH OF THE UNPROVOKED MILITARY ATTACK ON
IJAW COMMUNITIES IN WARRI SOUTH WEST LOCAL
GOVERNMENT AREA OF DELTA STATE** **20 May 2009**

Gentlemen of the Press,

On Friday the 15th of May, 2009 the Federal Government of Nigeria deployed its sophisticated military arsenal that was not even deployed in the Nigerian civil war to attack hapless Ijaw Communities of Okerenkoko, Oporoza, Kunukunuma and kurutie all in Warri South West Local Government Area of Delta state, through the Joint Military Task Force (JTF), which was supposedly set up to bring peace to the Niger Delta area. The attack reportedly effected by about 7,000 troops had the following military apparatus fully deployed, two (2) Warships, fourteen (14) Gunboats, five (5) Augusta Helicopters fitted with high calibre weapon, and two (2) Helicopter Gunboats. These weapons and equipment were all procured with our own oil-naira, produced and exploited from our land. The Ijaw nation ironically has become endangered by our own wealth.

The unprovoked attack has killed more than 200 innocent people, including women and children and hundreds of thousand of people are presently displaced, taking refuge in the bush under very excruciating conditions. Reports say the shelling and bombing of the communities continued till Tuesday, 19th May, 2009. At the last count, about six communities have been attacked and some completely razed, destroyed and decimated.

The latest unbridled provocation was reportedly premised on an encounter between the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND)

and the Joint Task Force which led to a fierce gun battle on Wednesday, 13th May, 2009 in which the military reported incurred some casualties in equipment and personnel. A further report was that the militants had hijacked an oil tanker with 15 crew members on board and the full-scale war declared against the Ijaw communities was to rescue the hijacked tanker and its crew.

The federal government's full deployment of military arsenal and the reckless use of force, which is only akin to situations of war between countries, to wantonly destroy our communities and decimate innocent women and children merely evokes the insipid feelings and memories of the gory tales of Odi in 1999. Odi, an Ijaw community in Bayelsa State, was completely razed in 1999 by the Federal Government of Nigeria under similar circumstances of claim, the search for militants and missing soldiers.

This latest military assault is a clear demonstration of Nigeria's ruling elites continued lipservice to resolving the Niger Delta crises. A government that professes concern and interest in bringing peace to a troubled region cannot be seen to be in regular policy summersault and lack of will.

As a people we are not surprised at the latest full-scale war declared on us. We know as a matter of truth several years ago the plans by some Nigerians to make extinct the Ijaws from the Nigerian map to grant the "Nigerian Owners" unfettered access to our natural endowments, particularly our oil and gas resources. As recent as the last National Political Reform Conference in Abuja, some persons from sections of this country openly canvassed for the relocation of the Ijaws if only to deny us

any claim to ownership of our natural resources. Sadly, the experienced destruction of our communities in 1999 and 2009 is being crudely perpetrated by a government promoted by a party we are all supposedly members, which presently has one of our sons as the Vice President of the Federal Republic. We cannot but describe this unwholesome attack and killings as dastardly, barbaric and insensitive.

The present attack and destruction of Ijaw communities in Gbaramatu Kingdom of Delta State is indeed unprovoked. The claims by the JTF spokesman Col. Rabe Abubakar is simply diatribe, insensitive and orchestrated to earn cheap accolades from his masters. The Oporoza community that suffered severe and catastrophic aerial and amphibious bombardment was celebrating the successful installation and recognition of their traditional ruler on Thursday and Friday, the 14th and 15th May, 2009, where Chief E. K. Clark, OFR, CON, was equally expected to grace the occasion as Father of the Day. The former Regent of the kingdom, Chief Alfred Bubor was one of those severely injured. So where is the evidence of premeditated attack by the militants? How could a community that was in celebration have at the same time been planning a large scale war with JTF?

The presence of militant camps across the Niger Delta has become public knowledge. Tankers and vessels hijacked by militants are never brought to towns and communities but secured within the precinct of the camps. Therefore how can the total destruction of a community and killing of innocent people be justified on a trumped search and rescue mission of hijacked vessel and its crew.

History is replete with facts that the Ijaws are aborigenes to the Niger Delta region and Nigeria; we migrated from nowhere to settle in the creeks and rivulets of the Niger Delta basin. As difficult and inaccessible our environment is, the supreme creator who settled us here never made a mistake to endow our most difficult terrain with natural resources. Ostensibly, it is for the development of our towns and villages and our people. Yet, our forced marriage with the Nigerian nation in 1914 has crudely rewarded our people with pilloried poverty and squalor, degraded and devastated ecology and grossly undeveloped and marginalised environment. And after several decades of dehumanising impoverishment, denials and failed promises from government to government, our youths decided to unbottle their anger in a manner probably not within the ambit of acceptable norm. The Federal Government in his reaction has once again without restraint, abandoned good reason and wisdom to be actively engaged in the killing, maiming and destruction of fellow Nigerian citizens. It is difficult for us to agree, as a people, if we all belong to the same geographical enclave called Nigeria. Are we wanted partners in this country? We would want to know!

As youth leaders we have repeatedly prevailed on our youth to sheath the sword; they listened to us and maintained the truce. We had given an order for the closure of all "militant camps" and implementation of a programme for Disarmament, Demobilization, Re-orientation, Re-organization and Re-integration (DDRRR). The camps were all preparing to close down awaiting the details of President Yar'Adua's amnesty announcement. This is attested to by the relative peace pervading in some parts of the Ijaw land, except for the sporadic unprovoked attack by men

and officers of the JTF. For a long time now, our leaders have consistently decried the continued presence of this "occupation force" called JTF in the Niger Delta. We have never failed to note that the presence of JTF was no panacea for peace, rather its presence has been inflammatory and a source for unabated restiveness since restive militant acts does the officers more favour than otherwise. We have been vindicated with the recent reckless, dastardly, unprovoked and unbridled killings of our children, wives, mothers and brothers.

Gentlemen of the Press, we are tired of the insincerity and double-speak of Nigeria's leaders. We cannot trust, rely upon and accept any promise by any Nigerian leader to improve our living circumstances. In the absence of a clear will to develop our land in spite of decades of expropriation and exploitation of our resources and wealth, the Nigerian Government has continually demonstrated abundant energy and will to marginalise, underdevelop, kill, maim and destroy our people and land. As far as we are concerned, no truth would emerge from any Nigerian in the search for solutions to our plight as even our neighbours would indulge in bemoaning our ugly faith.

We call on Mr. President to have the courage to bring out the truth in this matter, for we believe unequivocally that he was misled by the killer squad called JTF to order this unprovoked attack against our people. The scale of killing and destruction of our helpless sons and daughters is only similar to a genocide. Only yesterday when the displaced and injured were being attended to by medical personnel at Ogbe-Ijoh Warri as it is a normal practice in all crises ridden places, the JTF went after them and forcefully

arrested the medical doctor and nurse who were on humanitarian mission.
Enough is enough!

- **Accordingly, we call for and insist on a Commission of Inquiry to be established by the United Nations to investigate the circumstances surrounding this latest assault and killing of hapless and innocent people.**
- **We further insist that those found responsible by the Inquiry should be tried at the International Court of Justice for acts of genocide.**
- **We also call for the immediate withdrawal of the Joint Military Task Force and its personnel from the Ijaw land.** The JTF has become more of occupation force in our land and not advancing the course of peace.
- **We call on the Federal Government to take full responsibility for the rebuilding of all destroyed towns and communities and the immediate resettlement of all displaced people.**
- **We call on the Federal Government to immediately order its troops to stop chasing and harrasing innocent Ijaw sons and daughters in their own land for no reason.**

We thank you, Gentlemen of the Press for your kind attention.

Signed

Dr. Chris Ekiyor

President

Udengs Eradiri

Secretary General