

Hundreds Killed; Thousands at Risk in Niger Delta Civil Society Groups call for Immediate Ceasefire

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May 21, 2009, Washington, DC: On the eighth day of full-scale military assault in Nigeria's Niger Delta, civil society groups around the United States are urging lawmakers and the Obama Administration to intervene and bring a halt to the violence and allowing humanitarian supplies to be brought into the region. The military operation is being undertaken in the guise of rooting out militants. However, a number of villages including Opuye, Okerenkoro, Kurutie and Oporoza, are reported burned to the ground and many innocent civilians are reported among those killed in military operations in the Gbaramatu region of Delta State, over the past 8 days. Journalists and humanitarian aid continue to be barred from entering the area by the military. In addition, first-hand reports are emerging from the Delta that Ijaw men have been targeted for arrest in the Warri waterfront; the waterfront is the entry point from Gbaramatu to the safety of the urban area of Warri.

“The continuous raids by the Nigerian military on villages and communities populated by innocent civilians does not justify their claim that they are trying to purge the region of so-called militants,” said Joel Bisina, conflict management and community development expert on the Niger Delta. First-hand reports suggest the military is burning entire villages and looting them.

Oil companies have made record profits in recent years. Yet the oil-rich Niger Delta remains impoverished, with no schools, no health facilities, or basic infrastructure. Most food in the region is imported due to the decades of contamination of the water and soil by oil and gas companies operating in the region. Thus, the military blockade ultimately means starvation for thousands of people.

“We need to ensure not only humanitarian access to the region, but full and free access by the media to ensure accurate reporting of the situation,” said Joel Bisina.

“Due to the media blackout, Americans may not realize that a rise in the price of gas at the pump is related to bloodshed in the Niger Delta,” said Daphne Wysham, a fellow at the Institute for Policy Studies. “As one of the largest consumers of Nigerian crude, the United States government can not stand idly by and watch innocent civilians being killed, starved and maimed.”

“We are calling for an immediate ceasefire, and monitored independent third-party negotiations to seek a permanent solution to the inequities that are the root cause of the problems in the Niger Delta,” said Laura Livoti, founder of Justice in Nigeria Now.