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NIGER DELTA PEACE INITIATIVES

A Communique of the Recent Roundtable and Town Hall Meeting of Niger Deltans in Europe organised by the Niger Delta Peace Initiatives (NDPI) on Saturday, 2nd of July 2016, held at the Resource for London Centre, 356 Holloway Road, London, United Kingdom N7 6PA

NIGER DELTA: A ROADMAP TO PEACE

“Those who want to succeed must first ask themselves the right preliminary questions.”

- Aristotle

There has been no significant change in the lives of the peoples of the Niger Delta and their region, after more than fifty years of the first recorded agitation for Self-Determination and Resource Control in Nigeria. That agitation was led by our highly esteem Patriot, Late Isaac Jasper Adaka Boro in 1966. The agitation was well documented in the famous, “Twelve Day Revolution” book that was published the same year. It is sad and disheartening to many of us that another generation of Niger Deltans are currently fighting against the same vices that propelled Late Boro, to take up arms against the Might of the Federal Government in 1966. What a tragedy for a country, whose leaders are insensitive to the yearnings and cries of the citizenry for Equity and Justice which guarantee peace, stability, economic development and liberation for all and sundry! In fact, things have gone worse than they were in 1966, when Boro struck. **The current crisis in the Niger Delta is a product of the wicked and deliberate neglect of the mineral rich region that has sustained the Federal Republic of Nigeria for over 50 years.** One can clearly see why anger and frustration is flowing in the creeks of Niger Delta and beyond.

As a result of the present day happenings, we the peoples of the Niger Delta region of Nigeria, resident in the United Kingdom, gathered in London on the 2nd of July 2016, to reflect on various issues that affect the Niger Delta, which is at the centre of Nigeria’s current challenges. We note in particular, the emergence of the Niger Delta Avengers, which seems to suggest that Nigeria, is sitting on top of a volcano which can erupt at any moment, and we as Niger Deltans in Europe cannot afford to stay aloof.

After careful deliberations and discussions at the Roundtable and Town Hall Meeting of 2nd July 2016, we the peoples of the Niger Delta made the following observations and decisions:

- That Niger Delta Peoples agitation for Self Determination and Resource Control has been largely ignored by successive Governments in Nigeria. The injustice against our people continues unabated with renewed impunity. Successive Governments in the Country have used the divide and rule tactics to continue to undermine the legitimate rights of the Peoples of the Niger Delta.
- We acknowledged that various issues have long affected our sustainable survivability and corporate existence as indigenous peoples in the Federal Republic of Nigeria. We acknowledged the efforts of our foremost great heroes in the struggle for our political and economic emancipation, especially the likes of the legend Isaac Adaka Boro, Ken Saro-

Wiwa and many others that have died in the struggle and that their sacrifices should not be in vain.

- That having been occasionally and partially integrated into the mainstream of political governance in Nigeria, we would continually seek a nation devoid of false peaceful coexistence; and pursue Equity and Justice for all. That our dreams of political emancipation, and its manifesting seedlings of reality, need to grow along with an affirmative plan of action and framework for socio-economic emancipation through intensive capacity building programmes in the Niger Delta. Therefore, we frown at the decision of the Federal Government to scrap the Maritime University situated at Okerenkoko in Delta State, which could improve the development of the region and living standards of some of the people. We consider the decision as an act of gross injustice to the Niger Delta people. We would like to request the Federal Government by this Communique, to return to the original plan of the previous administration for the Maritime University to commence its operations this year, 2016. We believe this will benefit the people of the Niger Delta and indeed the entire nation for the following reasons:
 - (i) our people in the Niger Delta are mostly seafarers by occupation, therefore, a Maritime University at Okerenkoko will afford them the opportunity to acquire professional training and degrees in seafaring;
 - (ii) We heard that the Federal Government want to establish a National Shipping Line and believe that the Maritime University, Okerenkoko, will produce the manpower for the Shipping Industry and save the Federal Government from hiring foreign personnel at great cost to support the running of the proposed Shipping Line;
 - (iii) The Maritime University being a very specialised institution will attract students from other African nations and indeed international students from different parts of the world to come and study for Maritime and Seafarers' degrees and qualifications in Nigeria and consequently generate revenue for the country;
 - (iv) We believe the University will add value to the works of "The Nigerian Maritime Administration and Safety Agency" (NIMASA).
- That we wish to emphasize that there can never be any sustainable peace without justice and want the Federal Government to be reminded that peace in its broad sense, is a child of Justice and Equity. That, the argument that oil belongs to Northern Nigeria which some poorly educated Northern politicians have uttered in recent times is illogical, incomprehensible and provocative to the Niger Delta people. Our call for self-determination does not necessarily mean secession but to remain in Nigeria with a right to determine our affairs and future.
- That having reflected on the tripartite nature of resource governance, we frown at the failure of the Nigerian State to hold Multinational Oil Companies accountable for acts of

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environmental terrorism by the continued despoliation, pollution and gas flaring in the Niger Delta region. Our people have been exposed to all forms of life threatening diseases associated with the failure of the Federal Government to sanction Oil Companies that breach our environmental laws.

- That there is the need to restore and protect the flora and fauna in the Niger Delta; and for the region which has given the golden egg to be developed rather than the persistent destruction of our land and aquatic resources to sustain other parts of the Nigerian Federation.
- That the Federal Government should take urgent practical steps to implement the Niger Delta Technical Committee (NDTC) Report and the expert Report by UNEP on Ogoni land. We would like the appropriate regulatory agencies to be sincere and committed to the agenda of the clean-up exercise in Ogoni Land, currently read only on the pages of newspapers in Nigeria. We would also add that the clean-up and the remediation efforts should cut across the length and breadth of the Niger Delta.
- That we frown at the collapsing of the relative peace that was sustained by the Amnesty programme that led to increase in oil production in the Niger Delta; and we are of the opinion that relative peace can only be sustained by linkages, cooperation of institutions of governance, MDA, and Multinational Oil Companies through affirmative action that would enhance capacities and capabilities of unemployed youths. We align with calls by foreign governments such as the USA and UK for the Federal Government to adopt a political/ dialogue approach rather than a military option which can only increase further violence and instability in the region and the country.
- That, the people of the Niger Delta has little or nothing to show for the enormous wealth it has contributed to the national coffers. We want peace to reign in the region. This can only happen if the Federal Government adopts an “enlightened self-interest approach” to the infrastructural development of the region. An enlightened Federal Government with genuine interest for the Peoples of the Niger Delta, will rigorously monitor the performance levels of NDDC and the Ministry of Niger Delta Affairs, to ensure they meet their mandate and the strategic objectives for which they were established. We note with interest, comments made by well-meaning Nigerians that the creation of NDDC and the Ministry of Niger Delta Affairs is a clear demonstration of the Federal Government to develop Niger Delta. However, our Peoples' prefer actual commitments with evidence of developments, rather than demonstration of intent.
- Furthermore, we do not understand the logic as to why there is a sudden reduction in funding to the Ministry of Niger Delta Affairs, the NDDC and the Amnesty Programme Office. The funding levels before the current reduction were clearly insufficient for the development of the region. We recognise the financial challenges currently facing the country but an enlightened and sensitive approach in the manner the reductions were made and announced , would have diffused any feelings of injustice against the region and its Peoples.

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- That we seize this opportunity to call on the President to uphold the Federal Character Principles in the appointment of Nigerians to key Government institutions in the country. All previous Presidents have upheld that important and unifying principle to avoid a feeling of marginalisation by any section of the country. We are therefore disappointed that the recent waves of appointment made by Mr President, were skewed in favour of a particular region at the detriment of others. Such insensitive acts, create disunity, suspicions, rumours, perception of nepotism, corruptions, instability etc.
- We also frown at the skewed voting power and the latest voting arrangement that former INEC Chairman Professor Attahiru Jega accrued to the Northern region that puts the South in a very disadvantageous position. This may not promote mutual trust and long term peace between the Northern and the Southern part of Nigeria. Mr President and the legislative arms of Government should revisit these anomalies before the 2019 general elections to avoid potential flashpoints that could seriously challenge the cooperative existence of Nigeria as a country.
- That provision of more Schools, Hospitals, Water and Electricity in every Village or Community separated by Creeks, will improve the living conditions of the Niger Delta People. These are pre-requisites for sustainable peace and stability in the Niger Delta. Again, an enlightened Government with a desire to maximise Oil revenue, to sustain the 36 States of Nigeria should be wise enough to improve the livelihood of the Peoples in the region that produces the resources to keep the engine of Governance and the economy running.
- That the Federal Government should implement a well-targeted welfare benefit package to compensate for loss of earnings associated with the adverse effects of Oil exploration on farmlands, rivers, lakes and fishing ponds in the Niger Delta. The Government should also create alternative employment opportunities for the youths. For example, establishing SMEs for unemployed graduates, youths with vocational skills (Welding, Carpentry, Plumbing, Scaffolding, Dress making, Hair dressing, and Builders etc.). The Government Amnesty programme already has the capacity to deliver on these economic empowerment initiatives and should be encouraged to fast-track the creation of SMEs and Co-operatives, which will help to bring about peace and stability in the Niger Delta.
- That the construction of more bridges and roads will facilitate easy movement of peoples and goods in the Niger Delta region. It will encourage trade between those in the rural communities, towns and cities in the Niger Delta. Thus, increasing economic activities amongst the peoples of the region, which will help promote economic independence and the regeneration of communities. Hence, more likely that peace and stability will reign supreme in the region.
- That the Federal Senate/House of Representatives ought to have been agents of positive change and transformation in Nigeria. The rebranding of the Petroleum Industry Bill (PIB), the removal of the 10% Host Communities Funds and the de-emphasizing of the Local Content requirement by our law makers have deprived our people of their rights to compensations over Oil spills, Environmental degradation and improved social-

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economic development of the Niger Delta. We are therefore left with no option but to ask the Senators:

Whose interest are they working for?

- (a). A narrow visionless regional interest that fails to understand that its survival depends on the cooperation of the peoples of the Niger Delta?
 - (b). Multinational business interest without deep understanding of an enlightened self-interest approach to resolving strategic operational issues that could threaten their long term survival as business entities to satisfy the needs of all the stakeholders, including the peoples of Niger Delta?
 - (c). Or their personal interests supported by multinationals to undermine our national interests at the expense of the Niger Delta region, its peoples and the other poor peoples of the Federal republic of Nigeria.
- We appeal to the law makers to reinstate the 10% Host Community funds and emphasize the requirements for Local Content by allowing the peoples of the Niger Delta to participate fully in the “Indigenous Participation Scheme” of the Oil and Gas sector, through Clans or Communities in joint venture arrangements with Oil companies operating in the host communities as stipulated in the original PIB Bill. Such a gesture should appease Niger Deltans as it is an equitable thing to do for the region. We believe it will also usher in the peace and stability Mr President and the country need, to maximise its Oil revenue for the purposes effecting the promised “Change” by the ruling Party.
 - That the Presidential Adviser on the Amnesty should be encouraged to be more proactive in engaging the youths of the Niger Delta and not just those deemed to be militants. He should also be aware of sycophants that do not have any understanding of the issues affecting the peoples of the Niger Delta and the region. Many of such people regard the amnesty programme as an avenue to enrich themselves at the expense of the youths and the developmental needs of the region.
 - That the President should appoint Presidential Conciliators to supplement the role of the Special Adviser to the President on Niger Delta and Coordinator of the Presidential Amnesty Programme. Such persons will act as Presidential liaison officers in Niger Delta communities. They should be charged with responsibilities for holding regular interactive forums with community leaders and their peoples, traditional rulers, youth leaders and their organisations and other stakeholders in the region, monitoring and evaluation of the activities of NDDC and the Ministry of Niger Delta Affairs and, reporting their findings direct to Mr President on quarterly basis. The current monitoring and evaluation mechanisms since the creation of these quangos, are no longer fit for purpose. If the mechanisms were effective, Niger Deltans would have seen significant improvement in their lives in terms of human capacity and infrastructural developments.
 - That we welcome the President's call for Peace and Negotiation. However, the President should demonstrate sincerity of purpose in this call. How? He should reach out to the true leaders of the Niger Delta. These leaders are known by their peoples. We do not

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believe that the persons currently parading themselves as leaders represent our people. They do not have any grass root reach and backings to engage in any negotiations on behalf of our people. Therefore, are not in position to broker the enduring peace that the Federal Government badly needs at this critical time or indeed, at any other time. Many of such people have betrayed the trust of Niger Deltans over and over again. The Federal Government should study their antecedents and that of their collaborators, as well as those of some International Peace Mediators previously involved in the Niger Delta crises and draw its own conclusions. Such persons have made crises and instability in the Niger Delta as a business industry to be exploited to make profit. They can never provide sustainable peace in the region and Nigeria. ENOUGH IS ENOUGH.

- That the President should personally lead the Federal Government Team in any negotiations with a Niger Delta team with proven integrity and track record. The negotiations this time is too important and delicate to be delegated to some corrupt political class and their collaborators in the Civil Service, Multinational Oil Companies, previously failed International Peace Mediators and unfortunately some traditional rulers that have not been demonstrably different to those seeking to benefit from the crises. We believe Nigeria's survival at this critical time depends on the peace and stability of the Niger Delta. Therefore we urge Mr President to engage the peoples of the Niger Delta directly.
- That the military should withdraw from the Niger Delta and be replaced with the Nigerian Police. The presence of the military in the region causes provocation, which in turn, generates anger and fuels militancy in the region. It should stop the harassment and ill-treatments of Niger Delta Youths in the Riverine communities on the pretext of looking for Niger Delta Avengers. Such actions only fuel tensions between communities and law enforcement agencies.
- That we call on the Federal Government to recall that while our memories are still fresh about the genocide directed at the people of Odi in 1999, we have this year, 2016, witnessed acts of crimes against humanity directed at the people of Gbaramatu Kingdom in Niger Delta. We stress that there should never be any military terrorism visited again on the vulnerable people of the Niger Delta. We would also like to remind Mr President and the hawks in his Government that the whole civilised World is watching the development in the Niger Delta with keen interest, and its likely impact on the West African region of Africa. Any extra-judicial killing of innocent people in the Niger Delta would be playing into the hands of the International Criminal Court (ICC) in Hague.
- That while we support President Buhari's fight against corruption, it should not be limited to former President Jonathan's era because that will be unjust to the Nigerian Federation. We believe former President Jonathan inherited corruption from the Military eras of Gowon, Murtala Mohammed/Obasanjo, Shagari/Ekwueme (civilian era), Buhari/Idiagbon, Babangida, Abacha, Abdulsalami, Obasanjo/Atiku and Yar-adau/Jonathan, Governments. All the institutions of governance and all the associated departments of the Civil Service that worked with the above leaders were infested with acute corruption - a total of about 45years of unchecked corruption virus spread in the country, i.e. from 1966 to 2011, when Jonathan became the substantive President. Therefore, to describe former President Jonathan and his era as the most corrupt in

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Nigerian History, is a great distortion of facts. The Government has absolute right to pursue all corrupt cases. However, we do not support its selective approach to fighting the cancer of corruption in Nigeria. We feel all fair-minded Nigerians that believe in Equity, Justice, the Unity of our beloved country and the success of Mr President's Government would agree with our position.

- We would like to see the President prosecute his corruption war without any exceptions as to whether the suspected corrupt person is PDP or APC party chieftain. We urge Mr President to understand why Obasanjo failed woefully in his fight against corruption, using the EFCC. This great institution that attracted technical and financial support from the United States and United Kingdom with high hopes of success, was greatly undermined and made ineffective by Obasanjo's selective approach to fighting corruption. We urge Mr President not to follow a similar path that leads to nowhere but making Nigeria a laughing stock in the International comity of Nations.
- We salute the courage of Gen Alani Akinrinade (rtd) former Vice President Atiku Abubakar, Brig Gen Godwin Alabi-Isama (rtd) and all other patriotic Nigerians, calling for the restructuring of Nigeria. We therefore, join such voices and encourage all progressive Nigerians to do the same by persuading Mr President, the Senate, House of Representatives, the 36 State Governors, the members of the 36 Houses Assembly, all Traditional Rulers in the country, all Professionals, Business men and women that there should be no further delay in restructuring Nigeria on the basis of self-determination.
- We would like to remind Nigerians of the July 29, 1966 assassination of the First Military Head of State, Late Gen Johnson. T.U Aguiyi-Ironsi and his host, Lt Col Francis Adekunle Fajuyi. Nigerians were told at the time that these two great heroes had to die because Aguiyi-Ironsi's Government introduced Unitary System of Governance in the country. Those who executed the heroes also announced to the whole World that the murders were necessary to enthrone True Federalism in Nigeria. Yet, more than 50 years of the death of the heroes, True Federalism is still an illusion. Nigerians were sold a dummy and today, the beneficiaries from the deaths of Aguiyi-Ironsi and Fajuyi, ironically have refused to restructure Nigeria on the basis of the True Federalism, which they promised. **All our problems including: the current agitations in the Niger Delta, the marauding of the Fulani Herdsmen, Boko Haram, Corruption, Poor Educational System, Lack of drinkable water, electricity, functioning hospitals, roads, employment opportunities for youths, unity and development, are products of a skewed unitary system that have been grossly abused by those who have always held power at the centre.**
- We believe the enthronement of Fiscal and True Federalism in the country will bring about permanent peace and stability, which the country needs for rapid growth and development. Mr President should therefore listen to patriotic Nigerians calls to restructure the country and allow True Federalism to thrive across the length and breadth of our beloved nation. Furthermore, the Executive and the Legislative arms of Government should draw up a timetable for the implementation of the Recommendations of the 2014 National Conference. The issues that have always been at the centre of instability in the country, in our opinion, were adequately addressed with specific recommendations that are designed to promote peace, unity, development, economic stability and growth, sense of belonging, equity and justice for all, irrespective of tribe/ethnicity, religion, culture and regional affiliations.

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- Finally, Mr President is renowned for his no-nonsense-approach to governance and resolving critical issues affecting Nigeria. We therefore call upon him to show genuine leadership and address the issues that have always turned Nigerians against one another for the last 50 years. The time to do it, is the critical now. Otherwise, we will be truly “dancing on the brink”, as former United States Ambassador to our country, Mr John Campbell stated in his book on Nigeria.

Long Live the Federal Republic of Nigeria!

Long Live the Peoples of the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria!

Signed:



Annah T. Buseri, President, Niger Delta Peace Initiatives in Europe

Signed:



Dr Akpobibibo Onduku, Niger Deltan Academia

Signed:



MacDonald I J Mopho, Legal Adviser, Niger Delta Peace Initiatives, Europe

Signed



Rowland Ekperi, Patron, Niger Delta Peace Initiatives in Europe

Signed:



Chief Nicholas Goodhead, Chairman Niger Delta Town Hall meeting