

Environmental Rights Action / Friends of the Earth Nigeria

PRESS RELEASE

September 3, 2008

Environmentalists Denounce Arrests in Gas Flaring-Affected Community

BENIN CITY (NIGERIA), September 3, 2008 -- Environmental Rights Action / Friends of the Earth Nigeria (ERA/FoEN) has condemned the September 2 arrest and detention of a group of around 25 people including journalists attending a community forum on gas flaring at Iwherekan community (Delta State).

The arrests were made by Nigerian soldiers at the Iwherekan community gas flaring site operated by oil giant Shell.

Forum participants were released after approximately 5 hours in detention but were requested to report to a military commandant today September 3 at 9 am local time.

The people detained included journalists from national newspapers and television stations including the Federal Government-owned Nigeria Television Authority (NTA) as well as ERA/FoEN staff, community elders, women, and children. The NTA crew camera was confiscated.

The plaintiff in a lawsuit against gas flaring, Jonah Gbemre, a member of the Host Communities Network (HOCON), Comrade Che Ibegura, and ERA/FoEN project Officer, Chima Williams, were also among those arrested and detained by the soldiers.

Environmental Rights Action / Friends of the Earth Nigeria is demanding an apology from the military and from Shell for the detentions.

"We are shocked that this kind of reckless display of crude force which we thought had died and buried with the military junta of General Sani Abacha has suddenly resurrected under Yar' Adua administration. Why is government colluding with oil companies to shield the world from knowing the impact of gas flaring on the lives of Niger Delta people?" asked Nnimmo Bassey, ERA/FoEN Executive Director.

"This action has shown clearly that this government is not concerned about the impact of gas flaring on the livelihoods and health of Niger Delta people. It is also a clear evidence that what this administration has to offer for the genuine agitation of Niger Delta people for an end to gas flaring is, intimidation, crude force and cover ups. It is so sad that this has happened under a government that has gone to the roof top to profess

its belief in the rule of law," Basseyy added.

A Federal High court sitting in Benin, Edo State and presided over by Justice V. C Nwokorie, had on November 14th 2005 ordered Shell to stop gas flaring in Iwherekan Community, Delta State by April 2007, saying it violates the fundamental right to life and dignity.

The suit was filed on July 20, 2005 by Mr. Jonah Gbemre on behalf of himself and Iwerekan community against Shell, Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) and the Attorney General of the Federation, asking for the stoppage of gas flaring in the community.

Nigeria has been the world's biggest gas flarer, and the practice has contributed more greenhouse gas emissions than all other sources in sub-Saharan Africa combined, according to a World Bank 2002 statement.

Flaring is bad for both the environment and the people in the Niger Delta. It can lead to leukemia or asthma and premature death. It causes acid rain which acidifies lakes and streams and damages vegetation.

The arrests of Tuesday September 2 apparently were to intimidate the community and prevent environmentalists from their continued campaign for an end to gas flaring.

Isaac Osuoka, Executive Director of Social Action, said in a solidarity message:

"The gathering of civil society groups, community leaders and the media in Iwherekan lay bare the unity of Nigerians that gas flaring should stop now. Unfortunately the action of the soldiers demonstrates that this government has opted to side with corporate profit at the expense of citizens' well-being and the protection of the environment."

FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT IN NIGERIA

Nnimmo Basseyy, Executive Director, Environmental Rights Action/ Friends of the Earth Nigeria. Tel: +234-80 37 27 43 95 (Nigerian mobile)

Philip Jakpor, Media Officer, Environmental Rights Action/ Friends of the Earth Nigeria, Tel: +234-80 37 25 69 39 (Nigerian mobile)

Chima Williams, Project Officer, Environmental Rights Action/ Friends of the Earth Nigeria, Tel: +234 80 59 40 23 85 (Nigeria mobile)

FOR MORE INFORMATION ON GAS FLARING :
<http://www.foei.org/en/publications/pdfs/gasnigeria.pdf>