AN APPEAL TO PRESIDENT GOODLUCK JONATHAN TO TAKE ACTION ON THE OGORNI UNEP REPORT

9th June 2014

His Excellency
Dr. Goodluck Ebele Jonathan, GCFR
President and Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces
Federal Republic of Nigeria
Aso Villa
Abuja

Your Excellency,

A CALL TO ACTION

We, the undersigned Right Livelihood Award laureates from Africa and Middle East wish to convey to you, our collective concern regarding ongoing pollution in Ogoniland and your government’s apparent inaction in committing to undertake a comprehensive clean-up of the devastated Ogoni environment.

As you would recall, Mr. President, the Ogoni people had launched a pioneering and commendable non-violent resistance since 1990 aimed at rescuing their land from amongst others the vagaries of environmental degradation which had imperilled their survival as a people. In the course of the struggle, the Ogoni had lost some of its best human and material resources and continue to face death by instalment occasioned by ongoing pollution of its land. It was the recognition of the resilience of the Ogoni people in the face of the terrible odds that buffeted them that earned its charismatic leader, the late Ken Saro-Wiwa and the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP) the Right Livelihood Award in 1994.

In response to the Ogoni campaigns, the United Nations passed several resolutions on Ogoni some of which include the United Nations General Assembly Resolution 50/199 on the situation of human rights in Nigeria mandating the then Secretary-General, Boutrous Boutrous Ghali to send a fact-finding team to Nigeria in 1996. This was followed by recommendations from UN Treaty-bodies such as the CERD and the 1998 Report to the United Nations Commission on Human Rights by the then Special Rapporteur to Nigeria, Mr. Soli Sorabjee who had recommended the environmental study of Ogoniland.

It was therefore with great relief we received the news of the commissioning of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) to carry out a study of the environmental situation in Ogoniland and the subsequent submission of the report of the study to your Excellency on August 4th 2011. Your government’s avowed promise on the occasion of the release of the report to do all within your powers to ensure the full implementation of its recommendations of the study and reverse several decades of subjugation of the Ogoni people to the worst ecological disasters of our generation arising from unsustainable exploitation of natural resources was not lost on us.
The report, your Excellency is aware, showed hydrocarbon pollution in surface waters throughout the creeks of Ogoniland that feed drinking wells. Soils were found to have been polluted with hydrocarbons up to a depth of five metres in 49 observed sites, while benzene, a known carcinogen was found in drinking water at a level nine hundred (900) times above World Health Organisation(WHO) acceptable standards. To quote the summary of the report, “Some areas, which appear unaffected at the surface, are in reality severely contaminated underground and action to protect human health and reduce the risks to affected communities should occur without delay. In at least ten (10) Ogoni communities where drinking water is contaminated with high levels of hydrocarbons, public health is seriously threatened”.

It is therefore with shock that we received reports that almost three years after the release of the report of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) on the Environmental Study of Ogoniland, your administration has not moved in quick response to deal with the horrendous environmental situation in Ogoniland.

We wish to recall the obligations that the Nigeria government has undertaken as a State Party to several international instruments particularly the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) and the African Charter on Human and Peoples Rights (ACHPR) which recognises some basic rights that the Ogoni people are entitled to. These amongst others include the right to life (Art 6 ICCPR), the right to the dignity of the human person (Art. 1, UDHR), the right to liberty and security of person (Article 9 ICCPR) and the right to a generally satisfactory environment (Art 24 ACHPR).

In light of the foregoing, we call on the government of Nigeria to:

1. Establish an independent and well funded mechanism for the full implementation of the recommendations of the UNEP Report on Ogoni

2. Ensure proper consultation and the effective participation of the Ogoni people in all stages relating to the restoration of their environment

We wish to assure your Excellency that as laureates of the Right livelihood Award, we remain committed to working with the Federal Government of Nigeria through any effective process for the resolution of the Ogoni environmental matter.

We look forward to this matter being addressed with a renewed sense of history matched with action and in good faith.

Yours sincerely,

Dr. Hans R. Herren, Biovision, Switzerland (RLA 2013)
Jacqueline Moudeina, Chad (RLA 2011)
Nnimmo Bassey, Nigeria (RLA 2010)
Matron Sr. Tenadam Bekele Wolde, repr. of Dr. Catherine Hamlin’s Fistula Hospital, Ethiopia (RLA 2009)

Rene Ngongo Mateso, Democratic Republic of Congo (RLA 2009)
Jumanda Gakelebone repr. Roy Sesana and the First People of Kalahari, Botswana (RLA 2005)
Dr. Ibrahim Abouleish, Founder and President, SEKEM, Egypt (RLA 2003)
Helmy Abouleisn, Managing Director, SEKEM, Egypt (RLA 2003)
Guillaume Harushima, Centre Jeunes Kamenge, Burundi (RLA 2002)
Legborsi Saro Pyagbara, repr. of Ken Saro-Wiwa and the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP), Nigeria (RLA 1994)
Nomewende Joel Quedraogo, Burkina Faso, Federation Naam, (RLA 1990)