

- Shell-headquarters in the Netherlands is held liable by Friends of the Earth Netherlands/Nigeria and four Nigerians, for the massive damage that oil spills are causing to villages in the Niger Delta of Nigeria. Last Friday, Dutch lawyers representing the plaintiffs summoned Shell to clarify its role concerning oil spills. In early June, based on Shell-headquarters' response, the plaintiffs will decide whether to proceed with the lawsuit

It would be the first time that Shell's liability in its home country for pollution overseas would be asserted in a Dutch court. Anne van Schaik, Friends of the Earth Netherlands, said: 'The behaviour of Shell-headquarters on Nigerian oil pollution is fairly clear: it knows about it, it is able to act, it neglects to act. By means of this legal steps, we want to ensure that victims of Nigerian oil pollution can obtain justice in the Netherlands.' Nnimmo Bassey, Executive Director of Friends of the Earth Nigeria, said: 'In a globalised world, European companies should be held accountable in their home countries when they operate overseas in ways they would never dream of in their own backyard.'

The four Nigerian plaintiffs, all fishermen and farmers in the Niger Delta, have sustained considerable damage through oil spills in their villages. They come from the villages of Goi (Ogoniland), Ikot Ada Udo and Oruma and demand compensation for the damage.

Subsistence farming and fishing are the mainstay of the 27 million people living in the oil-exploited Niger Delta. For decades, oil spills from Shell installations and pipelines have been affecting local people. Shell Nigeria reports 250 oil spills annually. Shell's Nigerian subsidiary company acknowledges that it has a backlog in assuring the adequate condition of its installations and pipelines, in order to prevent oil spills. The cleaning-up of oil spills is often done superficially, leaving much poisonous oil in soil and water. Fisheries in the Niger Delta have declined at an alarming rate.

Thursday 15 May, in Amsterdam, Friends of the Earth Netherlands will hold a press conference at 10 AM CET at the West-Indisch Huis, Herenmarkt 99, Amsterdam.

Press conference participants include: Liesbeth Zegveld (lawyer for FoE Netherlands and the four Nigerian plaintiffs); Prince Chima Williams (Head Legal Resources Department, Environmental Rights Action/Friends of the Earth Nigeria); Anne van Schaik (leader of the globalisation campaign, Friends of the Earth Netherlands)