

The Ilaje Community has vowed to appeal the ruling of a San Francisco, US district court which absolved Chevron Nigeria Limited (CNL) from complicity in the 1998 killing of youths who were on a peaceful protest on Parabe platform in Ilaje, Ondo State.

In his closing argument yesterday (December 2, 2008) after the ruling, Counsel to the Ilaje Community, Dan Stormer said Chevron did not want to be held accountable in the press in 1998 so they lied. They don't want to be held accountable now.

The lawsuit is based on a 1998 incident in which soldiers shot non-violent protesters at Chevron's Parabe offshore platform. Ilaje youths had embarked on the peaceful protest to the platform to demand a better deal from Chevron for years of unfriendly environmental practices caused by oil extraction and to demand basic amenities, scholarships and jobs. among others.

On being assured that their grievances were being addressed with elders of their respective communities, the youths were getting ready to leave the platform when suddenly they came under attack from soldiers who arrived the platform on a chopper operated by Chevron. The soldiers were allegedly paid by Chevron. Two protesters were killed, one shot in the back. Many other protesters were arrested and tortured

The incident necessitated the suit filed in 1999 at the San Francisco district court by survivors and representatives of the communities - Messrs Larry Bowoto, Bola Oyibo (late), Bassey Jeje and Sunday Johnbul. The San Francisco US district court in its ruling however said Chevron is not liable for the killings, shootings and torture of the peaceful protesters

But the Environmental Rights Action/Friends of the Earth, Nigeria (ERA/FoEN), said the verdict is a minor leap backwards in the quest for justice for the Ilaje people.

This verdict is so sad because the facts against Chevron are overwhelming. The innocent people of Ilaje and the whole world are surprised because this ruling in favor of Chevron could send a negative signal to Chevron and its co-travelers in the oil industry that evil committed against innocent people can go unpunished, said Executive Director of ERA/FoEN, Nnimmo Bassey.

The Ilaje people have made it clear that they will appeal this case. Chevron can engage in legal theatrics to delay the course of justice but the people will continue to press on until justice is done, he added.

Interestingly, Judge Susan Illston of the San Francisco district court had in a recent ruling, rejected Chevron's final attempt to avoid trial, insisting that Chevron Nigeria Limited personnel

were directly involved in the attacks; transported the Nigerian security forces, paid the security forces and knew that the security forces were prone to use of excessive force

An attorney at EarthRights International and co-counsel for the plaintiffs, Richard Herz said: The entire history of crude oil extraction in Nigeria has been strewn with dollars for the corporation and politicians but tears and blood for local people. Chevron must account for its unrelenting acts of inane brutality to the defenseless people of the Niger Delta region. The Ilaje people will not rest until they obtain justice .

Although the plaintiffs did not prevail, Chevron now knows that it cannot conceal complicity in human rights abuses from public scrutiny ,

The outcome of the case is not the end of Chevron's trouble for its environmental and human rights violations. Another suit against the company over security practices in Nigeria is pending in California state court in San Francisco.

Last week the company was also accused of complicity in the shooting of unharmed protesters at its Escravos facility in Warri, Delta State.

Chevron is also beset by charges from communities in Burma, Ecuador and other countries where its activities have polluted rivers, destroyed livelihoods and food supplies, and led to human rights abuses.