

The Environmental Rights Action/Friends of the Earth, Nigeria (ERA/FoEN) has described the outcome of the landmark suit instituted by Ken Saro Wiwa Jnr and other Ogonis accusing Shell of complicity in the execution of author and human rights activist Ken Saro-Wiwa and other Ogoni leaders in 1995, among other human rights abuses, as a significant milestone in the search for justice in the bloody oil fields of the Niger Delta.

After legal twist and turns lasting nearly fourteen years, Shell has been forced to pay an out-of-court settlement put at \$15.5 million to the Ogoni plaintiffs who have struggled to hold the company accountable for complicity in atrocities committed against the Ogoni people in the 1990s, including the execution of Saro-Wiwa.

The plaintiffs had in a suit instituted at a New York court, alleged Shell financed, armed, and colluded with the Nigerian military forces during the Sani Abacha years that used deadly force and conducted massive, brutal raids against the Ogoni people in the Niger Delta.

After the announcement of the settlement on Monday (June 8, 2009), Shell in a hasty statement said its decision was a compassionate payment to the plaintiffs and the estates they represent in recognition of the tragic turn of events in Ogoni land, even though Shell had no part in the violence that took place.

But ERA/FoEN Executive Director, Nnimmo Bassey dismissed the company's claim in a statement issued in Lagos, insisting that Shell's sudden decision to settle out of court is a clear indication that the company is guilty of the atrocities alleged and much more.

This development signals a ray of hope for the people of the Niger Delta that Shell's irresponsible acts which have violated their land and livelihoods in the last five decades of oil exploration in the region will not go unaccounted for. It is however sad that justice was achieved not on Nigerian soil where innocent people of the Niger Delta have been labeled criminals and vandals but in far away US.

Bassey said the Nigerian government should take a cue from the outcome of the suit and compel Shell to commence immediate cleanup of pollution of rivers, streams and farms with its obscene profits and account for other human rights abuses that piled up before and after the Saro Wiwa incident in 1995.

Another phase of the legal campaign against Shell is billed for Shell's headquarters in The Hague, Netherlands, where the company faces a legal action for repeated oil spills, brought by residents of the Niger Delta, supported by Friends of the Earth Netherlands and Friends of the Earth Nigeria.

The clear message to Shell is that no matter where how far it is headquartered, the long arms of justice will get there. The subjugation of innocent people and their environment will never go unnoticed and must be accounted for. Shell may have ducked the dock this time around, but it will surely have its day in the dock soon, Bassey added.

On his own, Oilwatch International's coordinator, Keania Karikpo believes that Shell's claim of

accepting out of court settlement on compassionate grounds is a big insult capable of flaring tempers in an Ogoni where the people are beginning to enjoy peace in the absence of the corporation. Their stance shows that this corporation is unrepentant