



I stand on the shoulders of the heroes of the struggles and recall at this time a very striking stanza of the National Anthem of my country Nigeria, which says, The labours of our heroes past shall never be in vain. I salute the courage of Ken Saro-Wiwa and all other heroes who toed the non-violent resistance path and laid down their lives in the process. Their labours shall indeed not be in vain.

With about 60% of the world's crude oil reserves already exhausted it is stunning to see policy makers believing they can run into eternity on less than half tank. The search for crude oil and other fossil fuels has meant increasing focus on fragile ecosystems including offshore locations, nature reserves and other protected territories.

While UNFCCC gathers the nations of the world to talk about how to tackle climate change, the real structural causes are skirted and unacknowledged. With the world running on the machines of competition and massive consumption, it is clear that we need more than one planet earth to meet humankind's appetites. It is also clear that for current levels of extraction, accumulation and consumption, ethics have to be overthrown and impunity must be enthroned. It could not be otherwise because as the world seeks cheap energy, someone has to pay for it. With regard to the fossil fuel sector, those paying the price for others to enjoy are the communities on whose territories oil is found, the degraded environments and of course the global atmosphere.

Last year the Copenhagen climate conference ended up with an Accord that was more like a cord lashed across bent backs of poor countries. Indeed many were pressured to sign up or lose financial support. What will Cancun throw up? We wait to see.

The drive to produce more and consume more continues to promote the release of more carbon into the atmosphere, leading to the climate crisis that the world is confronted with.

The struggle to wean the world of crude oil addiction has taken many forms and shapes. Recent milestones include the expulsion of Shell from Ogoni land in 1993 to the Yasuni ITT in Ecuador where the government has proposed to leave the oil in the soil in exchange for halve the value of the oil. In Africa, a growing movement of community activists are demanding that new oil be left in the soil to avoid the sort of scandalous environmental pollution and violent conflicts that the oil industry has hatched in Nigeria's Niger Delta. This demand is also being made, as a direct pointer to the way climate change must be fought: cutting emissions at source, and sequestering the carbon where Mother Earth left it.

The world was awakened to the polluting propensity of the oil industry by the Deepwater Horizon explosion and accompanying spill in April 2010. The massive scale of the accident and the attendant media focus made it impossible for the responsible corporation to shirk responsibility. Contrast that with the case of the Niger Delta where Shell claims that an incredible 98% of the pollution is caused by third parties, principally local peoples.

The game of blaming the victim has been the style of the oil multinationals operating in places such as the Niger Delta. And such blames have not always ended in the mass media, some have led many to gross violence that have taken the lives of several people and sometimes the decimation of communities.

Climate crimes, environmental pollution and other acts of impunity will not end as long as people believe that they can assault Mother Earth and escape accountability. The preservation of the planet and the enjoyment of fundamental human as well as socio-economic rights will not be attainable until and unless the rights of Mother Earth are respected.

It is with this understanding that we applaud Ecuador for having already enshrined the Rights of Mother Earth in their constitution. At the moment, a proposal is before the United Nations to bring into existence the Declaration of the Rights of Mother Earth. Such rights would not be easy to attain in a world where relations are built or destroyed on the altar of competition and rapacious exploitation. It will take a change of heart on the part of humans to understand that just as we have rights, so does the Earth. Sustainable development will remain a mere phrase as long as people see sustainability as merely relevant to keeping their profit margins on the rise.

It is time for a global recognition that any harm inflicted on the planet directly corresponds to throwing the future of every inhabitant of the planet into jeopardy. Climate change is a clear manifestation of what can happen when a mode of civilisation is driven by factors that are clearly destructive. The fossil fuels driven civilisation has driven humanity to the brink, often termed the tipping point with regard to the climate crisis.

The time has come for action to be taken to reverse the trend. The time has come for the world to look away from the carbon driven development path and its governing mentality. It is time to

end carbon offsetting and carbon speculations as solutions to climate change. We have to see trees for what they are and not pretend that they are nothing more than carbon stocks. The false solutions being paraded at the conference of the parties to the UNFCCC can get as shocking as when organised climate crimes are rewarded with carbon credits and cash. An insulting example is one where the World Bank plans to extend support through the carbon trade route to gas flare projects in the Niger Delta. The unethical base of this scam can be seen in the fact that gas flaring has been an illegal act in Nigeria since 1984 and there is no way the halting of an illegal activity should earn carbon credits. Except if the entire carbon trade bazaar is a scam.

It is time to say no to the pretence that agrofuels can replace fossil fuels or that they are renewable and green when it is clear that they are not. The focus on agrofuels has led to massive land grabs in Africa. This has meant marginalisation of the poor, pressures on food supplies, diversion of land from food crop production, deforestation and abuse of human rights to mention just a few. It has also been seen by the biotech industry as a crack in the door allowing them to introduce genetically engineered crops where such would ordinarily be resisted and rejected.

It is time to establish an international climate crimes tribunal as proposed by the Peoples Agreement drawn up in April 2010 at Cochabamba, Bolivia. Such a tribunal would function in a way comparable to the international court of justice where crimes against humanity are tried. The climate crimes tribunal would try any sort of environmental crime that harms mother earth and thus the right of people to a safe environment. These would be seen as crimes against humanity. Culprits to be tried would include polluters such as those in the extractive industry. It would put corporations as well as their directors in the dock for climate/environmental crimes, which are in effect crimes against humanity.

Permit me at this point to remember a man who fought courageously against environmental damage by a dangerous machinery of state and corporation. Ken Saro-Wiwa (a RLA 1994 laureate) stood for non-violent resistance to erosion of environmental rights and socio-political justice. Although he lost his life at the hands of undemocratic forces, the path he charted remains the only viable option out of the Niger Delta quagmire. I salute the courage of all those who toe this path for the resolution of conflicts. I salute the suffering communities and peoples resisting destructive extraction. It is their courage that sustains our struggle. In solidarity we march ahead and will not give up.

Nnimmo Bassey Acceptance speech at the Rights to Livelihood awards at the Swedish Parliament in Stockholm.