



# The Right Livelihood Award

*for outstanding vision and work on behalf of our planet and its people*

Ken Saro-Wiwa / Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (Nigeria)†

(1994)

*...for their exemplary courage in striving non-violently for the civil, economic and environmental rights of their people.*



Ken Saro-Wiwa

Ken Saro Wiwa (1941-1995) was a member of the Ogoni tribe of some 500,000 people, living in densely populated Ogoniland in south-eastern Nigeria. He studied at the University of Ibadan and in 1973 he began to write books and articles and produced television programmes. He wrote 27 books and in 1994 received the Fonlon-Nichols Award for excellence in creative writing.

Ogoniland has produced US\$30 billion worth of oil for Nigeria, mainly through a joint venture in which the government is a majority partner, with Shell the largest private partner (30%). The oil production has resulted in very severe pollution of Ogoniland. To combat these effects, the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP) was set up in 1990, as the umbrella organisation for a number of broad-based organisations addressing the needs of Ogoni women, youth, churches, teachers, students and other professionals.

MOSOP has formulated two sets of demands: one directed to the Nigerian government, one to the Shell Corporation. The first of these were set out in the Ogoni Bill of Rights, drafted by MOSOP in 1990, which expressed Ogoni determination to secure their political, economic and environmental rights.

With regard to Shell, Saro-Wiwa demanded that the company bypass the central government, engage immediately in environmental impact assessments of its past activities and raise its standards to best practice.

Shell's response in 1994 was to cease production in Ogoniland.

In January 1993, to mark the start of the UN Year of Indigenous People, 300,000 Ogoni people demonstrated peacefully in favour of their demands, but the Nigerian government responded to the

Ogoni mobilisation with brutal repression. In a military occupation that lasted more than four years, over 1,000 people were killed and many more were made homeless, refugees or were imprisoned without trial.

Saro-Wiwa was arrested several times in 1993, when he was adopted by Amnesty International as a Prisoner of Conscience and became MOSOP President. In May 1994 he was arrested again. The pretext for his arrest was that Saro-Wiwa had incited youth to murder four Ogoni politicians. After a trial, which was condemned by international observers, and described as judicial murder by the then British Prime Minister, Ken Saro Wiwa and eight of his colleagues were executed on November 10th 1995.

Since the change in Nigerian government in 1998, MOSOP has been able to meet openly and there has been acknowledgement by government and oil companies of the acute lack of development in the Niger delta. More reluctant attention has been paid to the environmental damage done by oil exploration: as of mid-1999, no substantial action had been taken by the government, and MOSOP continued to demand that Shell conduct an environmental assessment of Ogoni and clean up the effects of its operations.

In 2004, following slow pace of progress/response by Shell and the government on the Ogoni decade of non-violent campaign, pockets of youths from the Ijaw ethnic nationality facing a similar situation like the Ogonis, decided to violently seize oil platforms thus disrupting oil production activities. This led to a very brutal reaction occasioned by heavy military campaign in the Niger Delta region, but forced the government to opening up discussions on environmental rights and resource allocation the basic ingredients of MOSOP's agenda.

MOSOP still requires local as well as international support in dealing with what they call a ground swell of an unholy alliance between the political class and transnational oil corporations .

#### **Quotation**

*"I harbour the hope that in founding the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People, in empowering the Ogoni people to fearlessly confront their history and their tormentors non violently, that in encouraging the Ogoni people to a belief in their ability to revitalise their dying society, I have started a trend which will peacefully liberate many peoples in Africa and lead eventually to political and economic reform and social justice."*

Ken Saro-Wiwa

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