



MOVEMENT FOR THE SURVIVAL OF THE Ogoni PEOPLE **(MOSOP)**



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PRESS RELEASE

KUKAH AND Ogoni RECONCILIATION

We have never thought of responding to the series of self congratulatory sermons by Reverend Father Matthew Hassan Kukah even when we know that falsehood when repeated could wear the garb of truth. But reminded that to many of us, a priest, or generally 'men of God' are taken as representation of God on earth who would not lie, we thought we need to put records straight especially to the Rev. Father himself, who may have forgotten some of the facts, as he is undoubtedly a busy man-tending to his parish, to the government, his business interests and other sectors.

The truth is that Father Kukah has held the position of facilitator of the Ogoni-Shell Reconciliation initiative for over two years and we are worried that his claims of progress are now bordering on the delusional. On several occasions his efforts to publicly exaggerate his progress have bordered on causing a major crisis in Ogoni. For the record, MOSOP would welcome a balanced dialogue about the future of Ogoni but none of the maneuvers of the past two years have resembled anything like a frank and open discussion, which we specifically sought two years back.

The idea of Ogoni-Shell reconciliation is not new. In recent times, the Father Kukah initiative is the third attempt. The first, which was attempted by the Methodist Church, ended in a tragedy as, in MOSOP's view; the facilitators could not muster the courage to call a party (Shell) to the dispute to order, when they started to undermine the process. Father Kukah was also involved in the second attempt, which was under the auspices of the Oputa Commission. That attempt ended when after the Commission had asked Shell to respond to the Ogoni demand for an apology, their spokesperson stated that if the Ogoni wanted an apology we could wait until the cats come home! We considered this symptomatic of a completely unsympathetic attitude and that ended the second attempt at dialogue.

Thus our response to the appointment of Father Kukah as facilitator was to welcome the Federal Government's commitment to engage in dialogue, which we hope will be sincere

and will recognize the need to redress the abuses, which have affected every single village in Ogoni. We stated our support for an approach to dialogue whereby the rules of conduct for the parties will be clearly spelt out by the facilitators.

Perhaps we need to state that the Father Kukah dialogue process did not come out of the blues. It started about a year earlier when the International Centre for Reconciliation from Coventry Cathedral wrote to MOSOP that they have been approached by Shell to explore the possibility of some dialogue process. We had responded by restating our commitment to any genuine and credible dialogue process that does not presume a predetermined outcome. It was after Coventry had submitted its initial report that reconciliation was possible if conducted with integrity that the Federal government started shopping for facilitators, and eventually appointed Kukah.

After the announcement of the process in May, the first task of the facilitator was to design a set of rules called the Concept Paper which were to bind the process. In Paragraph 1 of the Concept paper dated 21/11/05 it was stated specifically, "In order to engage in a process of negotiations that can lead to reconciliation, peace and development that will benefit all parties, a framework and principles for the negotiations have been agreed upon, after careful consultations with the parties". Accordingly it declared "**this concept paper contains binding rules of conduct for the process and neither party shall undertake any activities outside the process with respect to issues to be addressed in this process or affecting the other parties to this process.**"

On Agenda setting, the Concept paper provided in paragraph 2 that the respective list of agenda items submitted by the parties will jointly form the agenda. The parties will jointly determine, with the assistance of the facilitators, the order in which agenda items will be addressed and the milestones that need to be achieved in dealing with the agenda items.

Whilst we were waiting for a meeting for the agenda, Father Kukah handed over to us a document of a Shell clean up plan of Ogoni. There was no mention of a meeting between the parties or discussion of the issues facing Ogoni. Subsequently copies of the same Shell clean up plan document was sent to some individuals including the MOSOP President by the then Governor of Rivers State,

Dr. Peter Odili asking for comments. It was in these circumstances that by letter dated 1st July 2006 to Father Kukah, MOSOP wrote:

"We are glad to see some effort and thinking in the direction of environmental clean up, as this has been a core issue for MOSOP since its inception.

However we feel that it is important that the issues be dealt with within the framework of the concept paper by the facilitators. We note that in paragraph 2.2 of the Joint Concept paper, it is stated:

"The Ogonis and SPDC have provided their respective list of agenda items for inclusion. These items will form the agenda. **The parties will jointly determine, with the assistance of the facilitators, the order in which the agenda items will be addressed and the milestones that need to be achieved in dealing with the agenda items."**

We feel therefore that the parties actually meet so that we can ensure that the various issues, which are emerging, are dealt with in a sensible framework, which is widely and clearly understood. In our view this will help to prevent misunderstanding or misinterpretations emerging. It will also make clearer how different parties such as Shell, Federal Ministry for the Environment and NNPC, and communities are taking responsibility for different areas both now and in the future.

Besides, it is also likely to be important that some measures move in a co-ordinated fashion. For example, if managed properly, an environmental clean up could provide a useful basis for employment over a significant period of time. By ensuring there is a meeting, which discusses the various interventions, we could ensure that any environmental intervention also has the best possible impact in reducing poverty in various communities.

We also feel that a meeting of the parties will prevent an ad hoc situation developing further where initiatives are undertaken without adequate explanation. We would also want to add that some confusion would appear to have been inflicted by the dual channel through which the Clean-up proposal got to a lot of us. After the copy received from you as Facilitator which was copied and sent to our people, another copy was sent with a covering letter from His Excellency to some of us leaving people to wonder whether they were expected to respond either as individuals or as a group or whether to His Excellency or to you.

Since it would appear that this might have been caused by our inability to send you the list of our representatives, and in order to fast track the proposed meeting, please find attached the list of the Ogoni team comprising both the main and alternates:"

Rather than call for a meeting Kukah became evasive and even refusing to take calls and responding to mails. It was later that he revealed that he was not comfortable with the names we submitted to him as constituting the Ogoni negotiation team. Since then he set out to pick and choose, which Ogoni person including his version of youth leadership with known background that decent people should avoid.

In giving the events, Fr Kukah has consistently mis-stated several facts and inflated his own role and completely trivialized or written out of his 'history' the efforts of a range of Ogoni people over many years. On the Ogoni 9 families, he claimed that "No one ever mentioned the fate of the remains of the Ogoni 8. I thank God that I finally did achieve my objective of giving these gentlemen both names, faces and recognition. For on May 19th, 2006, they stood alongside the other gallant sons of Ogoniland as their faces adorned the site of proposed Ogoni Heroes Memorial at Bori. Even among the Ogoni people, most of those who turned up that date heaved sighs of relief and confessed that they were only seeing these faces for the first time." Any one familiar with the Ogoni story will know how far that is from the truth. The names of the Ogoni 9 have been waxed in songs and their pictures all over Ogoni for years. The Ogoni tragedy had actually split the Ogoni society but thanks for the opportunity offered by the Oputa Commission and many months of work, the Ogoni people were able to take significant steps on reconciliation. By providing the enabling environment, the Oputa Commission, can rightly claim credit for this unity, for it marked a turning point where, what used to be known as Ogoni 4 and Ogoni 9 became Ogoni 13.

Be that as it may, what happened was that prior to the events of the 19th of May 2006, at a meeting between representatives of the families of the 13 and Father Kukah held at the MOSOP office, the families had stated that it was not only in accordance with Ogoni custom but also proper that before, we embarked on the Shell-Ogoni reconciliation, that families be assisted to bury the remains of their dead. It was at this stage that Kukah agreed to take up the matter with the Rivers State government, which he did.

Whilst we thought we were to embark on the events of the 19th of May to give public demonstration to the unity of the Ogoni4 and Ogoni 9 as decided during the Oputa Commission we found that father Kukah had arranged for Shell to come to the event and read a speech in the presence of former President

Obasanjo and the world, to create the impression that he has achieved Ogoni Shell reconciliation, when nothing of the sort had occurred. It took a threatened walk out from MOSOP, Ken Wiwa Jr and Kenneth Kobani to persuade Father Kukah to abandon his plan and explain to Shell that they could not attend the event to announce their 'reconciliation'.

To our shock this same scenario of memorial events being cynically exploited was repeated in May this year.

The truth is that the Facilitator has been exploiting his closeness with former President Obasanjo to misrepresent the situation of a breakthrough in the Ogoni-Shell. That was the situation also last May when a MoU between the Federal Government, Shell, UNEP and Ogoni people was to be signed. The MoU, the terms of which have never been shown to nor discussed with the Ogoni people, and which has also been presented in certain quarters as a reconciliation agreement with Shell was to be surreptitiously introduced through a so-called spiritual cleansing service in Ogoni. It was MOSOP's insistence against the plot that earned it and its leadership the tirades that we have seen from the supposed neutral facilitator and 'Man of God'. MOSOP thinks it is Fr. Kukah that needs spiritual cleansing and not Ogoni.

The Ogoni might be anything to Father Kukah but no fools. When he says Ogoni have been treated more favourably than others by the government he lists appointment of Ken Wiwa, Jr as special assistant to former President Obasanjo, Ledum Mitee's national honour (and Kukah consistently lies about this as Ledum has no such national honour) and the Rivers state government's funding contribution of MOSOP's Ogoni Peace and Freedom Centre project in Bori. If this is what makes Ogoni favoured, then we have a problem.

Two other things Fr. Kukah says he has done well for Ogoni. The first is that he has commenced a process with UNEP for the clean up of Ogoni spill sites. MOSOP has insisted that we are not opposed to clean up per se but it must be part of the process of the talks and must be done transparently. If Fr. Kukah respects anything called transparency he would have revealed to the parties that two of the key UNEP people (Muralee Thummurakudy and Andrew Morton) leading the so-called clean up are ex-Shell staff who still maintains strong relationship with the company. Again, the process would have been open for discussions before implementation.

The second thing is that he has single-handedly but with the help of one Dr Ebenezer produced an Ogoni Development Plan. So, Ogoni cannot discuss amongst themselves and produce a Master plan for themselves? But if you want

to ask whether development of a master plan was part of his remit , then hear him: “ It is left for the Ogoni people to decide and answer the questions as to where the money for the realization of the plans will come from-if they decide that they will sit on their own oil.” In otherwise, the Ogoni can not actualize their development plan unless they allow Shell to drill their oil. We may also ask where will the money for the development of Fr. Kukah’s place come from? Where does the money that pays for his permanent suites at Transcorp Hilton and pays for the Sprawling Guest House, initially earmarked as the Reconciliation office, in Port Harcourt come from?

Lastly, Fr. Kukah lies about meeting with former President Obasanjo on replacement of Shell. It is common knowledge that government had once decided to revoke Shell’s license to operate in Ogoni. MOSOP and the Ogoni people have not hidden our preference for another operator other than Shell in Ogoni. Whilst an Ogoni delegation had met President Obasanjo and an agreement reached on replacement of Shell in Ogoni, it is NOT true that a company was suggested by the Ogoni. Rather it was former President Obasanjo that gave such indication and the whole of Kukah’s efforts has been and continues to be to frustrate that initiative on behalf of Shell.

Signed:
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Information Officer