

Update and Timeline of Recent Developments in Ogoni

The destabilising effects of how the so called 'Ogoni Peace Process' is being handled have been of concern to MOSOP for some time and we have also expressed reservations about the so-called UNEP clean up process especially the non transparent manner that the whole process was driven.

MOSOP has issued several statements expressing its concerns about the imbalance of the process and has expressed frustration with the facilitator, Rev Father Matthew Hassan Kukah both publicly and privately. From the beginning, Rev. Kukah has failed to convene a meeting of critical stakeholders.

It was this approach to the handling of the Ogoni matter that had necessitated MOSOP's pull out from the Kukah led Peace initiative last year.

However recent developments around an Interdenominational Church Service branded as a 'Spiritual Cleansing of Ogoni' by Fr Kukah indicate a potential crisis and risks for MOSOP and others in the Ogoni Community.

We are very concerned about the longer term divisive effects of the current situation. However for now we feel it is important to highlight recent developments so that you are aware of how swiftly events are moving.

Friday, 4th May, 2007

On Friday, 4th May, 2007, MOSOP was invited to a meeting with Church Leaders convened by Bishop Johnson B. Poromon (Rtd).

During his opening remarks at the meeting, the Convenor, Bishop J.B. Poromon stated that the meeting was convened to inform ministers about the Interdenominational Church Service slated for Monday, 14th May, 2007 and to find a common position amongst the church leaders on the issue. He said that the meeting was also intended for MOSOP and those in government to brief the Church about what they know about the Church Service.

At the meeting, most participants expressed shock about the fact that they were informed for the first time about the programmes for an

Interdenominational Church Service being organized by Reverend Father Matthew Hassan Kukah.

In a memo, titled "The way forward" shown to participants at the meeting, three key items were identified as key activities to be undertaken for the May 14th, 2007 events.

1. An interdenominational Church Service for the Spiritual Cleansing of Ogoniland
2. The signing of Memorandum of Understanding between the Federal Government of Nigeria, Shell, United Nations Environment Programme and the Ogoni People
3. Launching of the 1 billion tree planting campaign in Ogoni.

MOSOP immediately raised alarm that an MoU was not a matter for a church service but for a broader discussion and agreement otherwise it would be misunderstood by our people with consequent possible crisis which will be blamed on MOSOP. MOSOP stressed that it was opposed to such an initiative as it will have the tendency to split the Ogoni society.

Consequent upon this and the general disagreement amongst other ministers of God who claimed that they were hearing of the Church Service for the first time, a decision was taken that the convenor calls another meeting involving a greater number of ministers and church leaders to discuss the issues after which agreement could then be reached on summoning another meeting involving all the stakeholders in Ogoni.

Tuesday, 8th May, 2007

A meeting of church leaders was convened by Bishop J.B.Poromon at Methodist Church, Bori to still find a common position amongst church leaders who continue to claim ignorance of the entire programme and to deliberate on the church service.

Highlight of the meeting was the decision to hold another meeting on Friday, 11th May, 2007 involving all major stakeholders especially Ogoni people in government, church leaders and MOSOP

MEMO TO OGONI PEOPLE

Within this period, we understand that a document titled "Memo to Ogoni people" was being circulated in Ogoni in which a faceless group called the "Ogoni Youth Martyrs Brigade" had berated MOSOP for its complacency to inform the Ogoni People on what it term "the truth" about Rev. Father Kukah's activities in Ogoni and the plan to bring Shell back to Ogoni through the Spiritual Cleansing Church service. In the memo, the group had mentioned certain Ogoni citizens as those behind the Church programme and had threatened that Ogoni People should boycott the service.

MOSOP has completely dissociated itself from the said memo by the faceless "Ogoni Youth Martyrs Brigade".

Wednesday, 9th May, 2007-Threat to Ledum Mitee's Life

While MOSOP was still contemplating on the best approach to deal with the unfolding crisis, HRM Chief G.N.K Gininwa, the Gbenemene Tai Kingdom and Chairman, Ogoni Council of Traditional Rulers and one of the Ogoni citizens mentioned in the said memo had through two emissaries threatened to wipe out Mr.Ledum Mitee and his family.HRM King Gininwa had falsely accused Mr.Ledum Mitee of inciting some youths to kill him

Same day, Mr. Ledum Mitee wrote to HRM King Gininwa copying the State Commissioner of Police and the Governor about the threat to his life.

In a related development, the Governor of Rivers State, Dr.Peter Odili invited the MOSOP President, Mr.Ledum Mitee for meeting in Government House. On arrival, the MOSOP President met all the Ogoni Commissioners in Odili's government and one Rev Fr Pius Kii already seated.

In their separate speeches at the meeting, two of the three Ogoni commissioners present (Dr.Mrs Roseline Konya, Mr. Magnus Abe) and Rev.Father Pius Kii accused Mr.Ledum Mitee and MOSOP of standing in the progress of and blocking developments in Ogoniland particularly the UNEP backed clean-up process.

Continuing, the group showed the Governor a document by a faceless group calling itself Ogoni Youth Martyrs Brigade calling certain named supporters of the planned MOU signing "vultures" and threatening them.

Speaking further, they accused Mr.Ledum Mitee and MOSOP of being behind the publication.

The MOSOP President, Mr. Ledum Mitee in his response informed the Governor that the three speakers were being economical with the truth and failing to convey the correct situation on the ground to him especially the risk anybody including MOSOP faced from the people, if anything was done to reinforce a perception that Shell was returning to Ogoni or that an MOU was to be signed with Shell.

The MOSOP President, rejected the allegation of MOSOP and himself being behind the publication titled, "Memo to the Ogoni People" and informed the Governor of what has happened especially in the light of the memo which was shown to participants at the meeting held on Friday,4th May,2007 in which the signing of a MoU between the Federal Government, Shell, and the Ogoni people featured as one of the activities that will be undertaken during the church service

The MOSOP President further handed over a copy of the letter he had written to HRM King G.N.K to the Governor.

In his response, the Governor, Dr.Peter Odili expressed surprise at the turn of events and denied that he knew anything about an MoU Signing.

Continuing, he said that he had only been informed about the impending visit of the President, Chief Olusegun Obasanjo for a church service.

Responding to the question on the way forward which was put to the MOSOP President,Mr.Ledum Mitee by the Governor,Mr.Mitee said that the Church Service be either cancelled since it has not been well discussed amongst the Ogoni people or the idea of signing any MoU or anything relating to it be dropped completely from the programme.

Concluding, the Governor advised that all those present to attend the meeting being summoned by Church leaders for the following day, Friday, 11th May 2007 for which all sides had been invited and find a common position that is reflective of the desires of the Ogoni people on the issue.

Thursday, 10th May, 2007

An urgent meeting of MOSOP Steering Committee was held in which several issues related to the Interdenominational Church Service was exhaustively discussed and debated.

At the end, a decision was taken that MOSOP honour the invitation from the Church for a meeting scheduled for Friday, 11th May, 2007 and state its position on the issues of the Spiritual Cleansing Church Service.

Friday, 11th May, 2007

On Friday, 11th May, 2007 the much awaited meeting of all stakeholders was held at the Methodist Church Bori facilitated by all the Ogoni Church leaders led by Bishop J.B. Poromon and other bishops such as Rev Gbenegbara, Bishop of the Missionary Diocese of Ogoni of the Anglican Communion, Rev. Kattey, Bishop of the Niger Delta North Diocese of the Anglican Church, Rev. W.A. Yorbe, Bishop of the Ogoni Diocese of the Methodist Church of Nigeria, Rev. Vurasi, Bishop of the Andoni/Ogoni Archdeaconry of the Christ Army Church, Rev. Don Aadum and a host of others.

The meeting also had in attendance the Ogoni Commissioners (Dr. Mrs Roseline Konya, Commissioner for Environment, Mr. Kenneth Kobani, Commissioner for Finance) except Mr. Magnus Abe (Commissioner for Information) who was reported to be on official assignment outside the state, other government officials such as Rev. Father Pius Kii, the Chairman, Rivers State Universal Basic Education Board, the Chairman, Gokana Local Government Council, Chief Fred Kpakol, MOSOP executive led by the MOSOP President, Mr. Ledum Mitee, Dr. Ben Naanen, Dr. Sonpie Kpone Tonwe and other notable sons and daughters of Ogoni.

At the exploratory stage of the meeting, it was quite apparent that even amongst the church leaders there was no agreement on the Spiritual Cleansing Church service. Most of them who had spoken at this stage expressed surprise at the idea of a cleansing service stressing that they were not aware of it and that in their view the idea was inappropriate.

At a point, following the expression of ignorance about the Spiritual Cleansing Church service by most of the church leaders, one of the Church leader and the most active proponent of the Church Service said that the idea of a Spiritual Cleansing Service was not that of Kukah but was a home grown initiative from amongst the church leaders and ministers from Ogoni.

In response, another church leader reported that that was not the truth. Continuing the Church leader said that the idea of a service was his and what he had in mind was a Thanksgiving Service following the near plane crash that occurred last year when some selected Ogoni leaders including

church leaders under the guise of a Thank you visit to the President were taken to Abuja to advocate for the endorsement of Governor Peter Odili by President Olusegun Obasanjo as his successor.

Speaking further, the Church leader stressed that it was Rev.Father Kukah who later changed the entire programme from a Thanksgiving Service to a Spiritual Cleansing Service that is presently being planned arguing that since they are talking about an Environmental Clean-up of Ogoniland, a Spiritual Clean-Up Service will also be needed.

Following the ensuing debates and several speeches and positions advanced at the meeting, it was clear that certain views dominated the meeting:

1. That the Spiritual Cleansing Service have not been well discussed amongst the ministers and perhaps was being planned by a few people and made to appear as an initiative from the ministers from across Ogoniland.
2. That the idea of Spiritual Cleansing Service and MoU should be dropped whilst only a Thanksgiving service be held;
3. That everything about any service, MoU or not, should be suspended or cancelled.

At this point, the facilitator of the meeting was forced to put the last two views to vote, motions having been appropriately moved and seconded for them by the proponents and supporters of the two views.

After the votes were counted, those in support of the motion that everything relating to the Service be suspended won with an overwhelming majority votes of forty three(43) as against thirteen votes(13) garnered by those who were rooting for a Church Service to be held even if it is just a Thanksgiving Service.

It was however just at this point after the successful vote had been held and result declared that Rev.Father Matthew Hassan Kukah came into the meeting.

Shortly after he had taken his seat, some youths invaded the meeting disrupting the peaceful meeting that was on course and causing everyone at the meeting to scamper for their dear lives.

Saturday, 12th May, 2007

Instead of respecting the democratic will of the people as expressed in the meeting held the previous day in which it was voted that everything related to the Church Service be suspended, some Ogoni people in government went back to Government House to devise strategies to ensure that they continue with the Church Service.

However, across Ogoniland, the area had become increasingly tense and restive following the fear that some government officials were keen on subverting the will of the people as expressed in that Friday meeting. Palpable fear ruled the air.

By the morning of Saturday, the MOSOP President, Mr. Ledum Mitee was again invited to a meeting in Government House by the Governor, Dr. Peter Odili reminiscent of the famed meeting in Government House in 1993 in the wake of the boycott of that year's election by MOSOP. On arrival at the Government House, the MOSOP President met Rev. Fr. Pius Kii, Rev. Fr. Matthew Hassan Kukah and Dr. Mrs. Konya (the Environment Commissioner) already assembled. In their statements to the Governor, they all alleged that Mr. Ledum Mitee was the one who organized the youths to kill Rev. Fr. Matthew Kukah and them.

They pleaded with Ledum Mitee to rescind the decision that had been taken at the meeting held the previous day and that the Church Service will only be a Thanksgiving Service and will not involve any thing like the signing of a Memorandum of understanding.

Mr. Ledum Mitee in his statement denied the allegations and after series of altercations between him and others left the meeting.

After the meeting, an emergency meeting was convened by MOSOP to assess the development and to agree on appropriate response considering the tension in the area which have the signs and foreboding of our peculiar past experiences with conflict in the area and the death of people. A compromise was reached that instead of another round of blood to be spilled again in Ogoni, if there is an assurance from the level of the government that no MoU will be signed, no tree planting will take place and that we can use the opportunity of the Service to inform the President that we no longer want Shell in Ogoni, perhaps, MOSOP can issue a statement to that effect to calm tension in the area.

Sunday 13th May, 2007

Again, the Governor called another meeting on Sunday, 13th May, 2007 in which the MOSOP President was invited.

On the suggestion of the MOSOP President, Mr. Ledum Mitee, the government started putting out a statement that the service for Monday would have nothing to do with signing of MoU.

In order to reassure the Ogoni people, MOSOP followed this with its statement that having been assured that there would be no MoU, Ogonis should attend the event and be peaceful as it would provide an opportunity for the Ogoni people to tell Mr. President their views.

Preparations for the Interdenominational Church Service include low level flights by helicopter gunships over Bori, Ogoni.

It would be stated that up to this point, MOSOP's overriding interest was the peaceful resolution of the crisis in such a way that Ogoni interest will not be affected and also to guide against any situation that will lead to a breakdown of law and order and the death of people, an experience the organization was not prepared to go through again.

Monday 14th May, 2007

The Church Service eventually held on this day almost about five hours behind schedule due to the late arrival of the President, Chief Olu Obasanjo

At the service, Mr. Kenneth Kobani read the Welcome address on behalf of the Ogoni people. The highlight of the address was the decision by the Ogoni people reached the previous day that the Federal government should give the Ogoni oil concession to another oil company other than shell.

Instead of responding to the issues raised in the speech, the President in his characteristic manner of always abusing the Ogoni people any time occasion provided, sidetracked the issues and descended on the MOSOP President, Mr. Ledum Mitee and MOSOP describing us as clog in the wheel of progress of the Ogoni people, that MOSOP has outlived its usefulness in a democratic setting and that the elders and those in government should

assert their leadership. Reverend Matthew Hassan Kukah also spoke in the same vein.

What President Obasanjo said is public knowledge but people and generations to come will judge that speech and its relevance or otherwise one day.

Monday 14th May, 2007

A letter with reference no. PIC/U/OGONILAND/VOL.1/xe dated 7th May,2007 from the Presidential Implementation Committee on the Clean up of Ogoniland headed by Rev.Fr Kukah was received at the MOSOP office inviting the MOSOP President to a meeting scheduled for Saturday 12th May,2007 at the Hotel Presidential Port Harcourt for the committee to" update itself on the clean-up project particularly **the MOU between Shell, UNEP, Federal Government, Rivers State Government and the Ogoni people** and the programme on the spiritual cleansing exercise coming up on Monday 14th May 2007."

The letter arriving days after the meeting was supposed to have been held is an indication that it was not intended for MOSOP to attend the meeting considering what they had hoped to discuss and buttresses the point that had been made about the signing of MoU.

Tuesday 15th May, 2007

Crisis between some K.Dere community youths and Shell got to a head over Shell's failure to honour an earlier promise, led to the occupation and closing of valves at the Bomu Manifold, a major oil pipeline hub that conveys crude oil from other parts of the Shell's Eastern Division through the Bomu-Bonny Trunk line to the Bonny Oil Terminal, thereby shutting down the conveyance of more than 170,000 barrels of crude oil and cutting down on Nigeria's oil production.

Wednesday, 16th May, 2007

Community elders appealed to and persuaded the youths that had occupied the manifold to end their occupation of the manifold and re-open the pipeline promising to take on their case with Shell leadership.

The youths heeded to the appeal by the elders and vacated the manifold after reopening the valves.

It would be recalled that Shell halted its oil production activities in Ogoniland in the wake of Ogoni protests in 1993.

However, the company's pipelines still criss cross Ogoniland especially the Bomu Manifold, a major pipeline complex which is a collection centre for

crude oil produced from other parts of Shell's Eastern Division and conveyed through the Manifold to the Bonny Oil Export Terminal.

Saturday, 19th May, 2007

At about 2am , an armed gang broke and entered the residence of Bariara Kpalap, the MOSOP information officer, put his children and wife at gun point and asked for the his whereabouts. On being told that he had traveled and not at home, they assaulted his wife and threatened to be back but nothing was stolen. Bariara and other key MOSOP leaders have been at the receiving end of accusations on the authorship of the aforesaid memo to Ogoni people, which is completely false.

Conclusion

MOSOP is deeply concerned about the prospects of a deteriorating conflict situation which was needless in the first place had Rev.Father Kukah been alert to the sensitivities involved in the Ogoni issue. The signs on the ground now point to the same scenario of accusations and counter accusations that led to the unfortunate incidence of May 1994 and the subsequent clampdown on MOSOP and the Ogoni struggle.

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