

200 Meters - Compromising the Truth

By

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We are constrained by latest developments relating to the Bill for Revenue Allocation (Abolition of onshore/offshore dichotomy) Act 2002 – herein referred to as the Bill – to write the following. In this brief article, we unequivocally condemn executive slants, manipulations and fabrications designed to render injustice and other inequities against the peoples of the Niger Delta geopolitical region. What we mean by Executive slants can be reduced to President Obasanjo's stance as well as his unsettling maneuvers to justify a fundamental wrong against the peoples of the Niger Delta region.

We know about the short legislative history of that Bill and its procedural pushing and bouncing through all arms of government. We know that the President was forced to present that Bill to the National Assembly. We know it was not his desire, in the first place, to do so. It was a face saving gesture given a wounded President smarting from both political pummeling and humiliation served him through the impeachment saga. He has not learned a thing since then – at least nothing about his penchant for underestimating the intelligence of Nigerians.

Fellow Nigerians, it is not unheard of for governments to feed misinformation to its populace in order to get support for a project with clandestine objectives. It therefore comes as no surprise that our present government is trying to do the same now regarding the issue of justice and fairness to the Niger Delta, the breadbasket of the nation. As many despotic and totalitarian regimes have found out to their chagrin, we are now in the information age. Information is now freely and readily available even to the commoner. We hereby avail ourselves of the opportunities of this Information Age and bring to light the fact that your government has not been totally truthful in dealing with the Legislators, Governors and the governed.

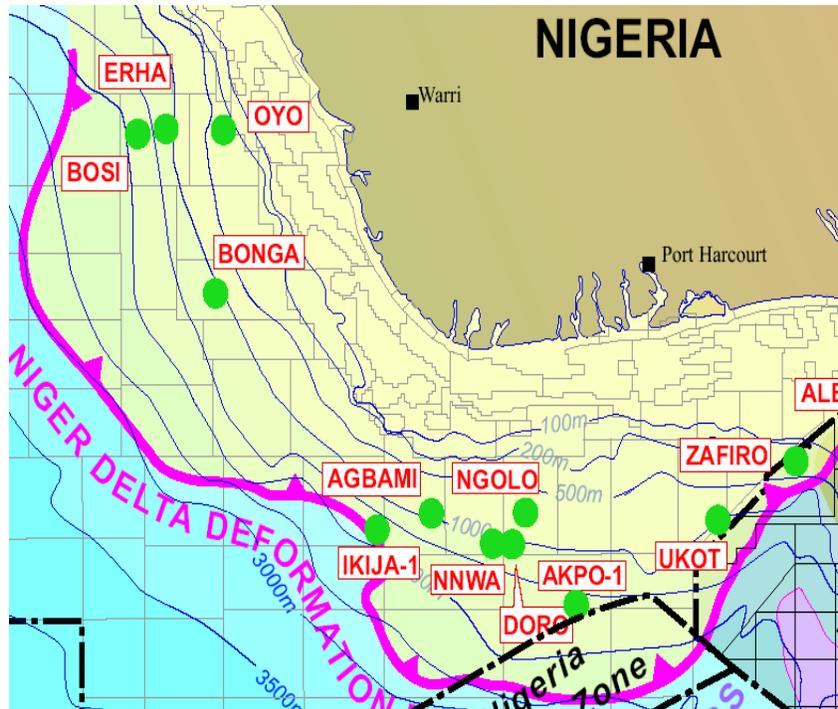
It takes bold and good information to expose what has graduated into a tug-of-war between justice for the people of Niger Delta region and the President. That he is promoting a personal agenda, albeit with a deliberate and skillful manipulation of geo-political sentiments, to deny fundamental rights and justice to the people of the Niger Delta region is well known. What geo-political sentiments? Nothing but the “majority syndrome” – a vague assertion that crude oil was given to Nigerians by God and that some Nigerians must scamper to corner as much gains from it without consideration of rights of a minority few endowed with the crude oil. Niger Deltans know that for a fact and equally know that God did not intend for their rights of ownership and benefits from proximity to be denied them while distant others grab all.

We also know that the President has come up with spurious arguments against the Bill for the Revenue Allocation (abolition of onshore-offshore dichotomy) Act 2002 as passed by the National Assembly. His abuse of power and office against the effective management or administration of crude oil resources in Nigeria is clearly demonstrated by his self appointment over the Ministry of Petroleum resources. With every twist, the shallowness of his arguments is exposed. Concomitantly, one must question his impartiality over national matters or his vision in leadership.

For example, he is recently reported to have called in Governors from the Niger Delta region to explain and strike a compromise that, if accepted, shall see to the amendment of that Bill along terms limiting derivation to 200m water depth Isobaths. In his explanation, and classic show of deliberate misinformation, he is also reported to have assured Niger Deltans that there is not much to loose as no oil reserves other than in the Abo field can be found beyond the 200m water depth isobaths. Is it that the President of Nigeria and overseer of the nations oil industry is deliberately misinforming the public to achieve a sinister objective or that he genuinely does not have a clue regarding what resources he is administering?

Nigerians need be aware of the truth with verifiable data and with other information. For this purpose, we include two maps that clearly show what obtains generally within the Gulf of Guinea:

1. For Nigerians to see and make informed opinion about what obtains in that region.
2. For Nigerians to understand as mere fabrications and misinformation the Presidential propaganda of international war as possible consequence of the Bill passed by the National Assembly.



Figures 1 - Detailed information about oil reserves, fields and contours in the Gulf of Guinea that show water depths and oil field locations in the deep offshore. Source: www.equatorialoil.com/pages/techreview.html

As can be seen in **Figure 1**, major oil fields (green dots) in the deep off shore lie beneath the 200m water depth isobaths. Contracts for exploration, and indeed, exploration of some have already commenced as given below:

OIL FIELD	LOCATION	EST. RESOURCE Peak production (bbl/d)	DISCOV. / CONTRACT DATE	MULTI NATIONAL CORPORATION
AGBAMI	OPL 216	200,000	June 2005	Chevron Texaco
AKPO 1	OPL 246	125,000	May 2000	TotalPanaElf
BONGA	OML 118	120,000	March 2001	Shell Drilling
ERHA	OPL 209	210,000	2004	Exxon Mobil
ABO	OPL 316	70,000	2002	Agip

Not only is there the greatest wealth Nigeria has yet tapped beneath the 200m water depth isobaths, there are massive reservoirs of natural gas with economic potentials much greater than wealth from crude oil. So, the Presidential misinformation is nothing short of a deliberate gambit that insults the intelligence of Niger Deltans and further exposes a determination to deny Niger Deltans their rights and special benefits from exploration of crude oil and natural gas resources in their area.

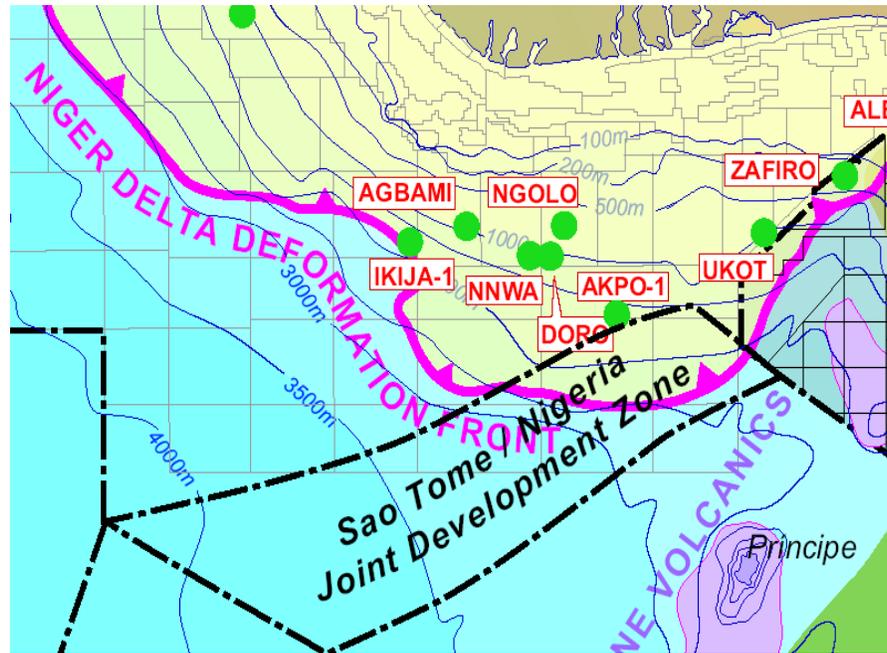


Figure 2 – Shows the Joint Development Zone with the Republic of Sao Tome and Principe, highlighting area of overlap in field location for both countries. Source: www.equatorialoil.com/pages/techreview.html

In *Figure 2*, we see the positional advantage and clear boundaries of the Joint Exploration Zone – such that any prospect of war with the Republic of Sao Tome and Principe is greatly minimized. The Niger Delta formation is almost totally outside the joint development zone with Sao Tome. President Obasanjo was simply being flippant by insinuating that the Bill sent to him for signature could engender a war with neighboring countries. We must remember that similar flippancy and callousness by previous governments towards the Southern minorities recently came home to roost and cost us the Bakassi Peninsular.

Should Oloibiri not be a modern city and tourist attraction as the first place where oil was discovered in Nigeria? It should be. But the reality on the ground is that it is a polluted and abandoned place. This government is intent into turning the whole of the Niger Delta into Oloibiri while modern cities are built hundreds of miles away from the source of the wealth.

Should the Niger Delta Region not derive special benefits from her endowed resources? She should! Therefore, we suggest the following:

What the National Assembly must do:

1. As Nigerians overwhelmingly support the abrogation of onshore/offshore dichotomy, it remains the duty of the National Assembly to ensure that the spirit of the Bill sustains in its purest form – that is, the wall of dichotomy be completely removed. It is absurd for a section of the Bill to abrogate the dichotomy but another section imposes a limitation beyond or beneath a certain offshore location or depth.
2. Assuming that the 200m cut off water depth isobaths is the acceptable compromise, it remains that the National Assembly must either concede all existing fields and resources within 200m water depth isobaths to the states for 100% resource control, or
3. That President Obasanjo's limitation be completely rejected and the states given partial resource control of at least fifteen percent (15%) of natural resources without the dichotomy factor. This is the fairest and most equitable formula for peace amongst all stakeholders.
4. The National Assembly must be dispassionate over this matter. It is necessary that relevant Committees go to work from the scratch, reviewing all data relating to natural resources in Nigeria and thereby come up with a more democratic resolution that guarantees lasting justice and fairness to all stakeholders. Citizens who are willing and able to testify before any Senate or House Committee with facts and data regarding this matter should be encouraged. The final decision must be reached after careful consideration of all viewpoints and data and not upon whimsical manipulations, blackmail and unreasonable compromises or scheming by any political authority.
5. The National Assembly must neither override the President nor accede to the reported compromise spun by the Presidency. They must write a new Bill that actually addresses the Resource Control agitation once and for all.

Nigeria is greater than and shall continue beyond President Obasanjo. She will never know peace unless justice, fairness and equity are given to Nigerians through the institution of individual and property rights within clearly defined principles of true federalism. In this case of rights pertaining to crude oil ownership, it is absolutely silly and naive for the President or any scheming geo-political group of today to think that any unpopular law can stop the Niger Delta people from gaining their rights. Therefore, wise people can choose between two extreme options: The continuance of hostilities and trouble or the timely institution of peace through sensible legislation and through other government regulations. In the preponderance of former, it is guaranteed that no one wins – not President Obasanjo, not the Niger Deltan, not any dubious agenda of a geo-polity, not the business sector, not the economy, and definitely not Nigeria.

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