

URGENT ACTION

COMMUNITY IN NIGERIA DRINKING POLLUTED WATER

There is an urgent need for the government and multinational oil company Shell to ensure a regular supply of safe water to people in the oil-producing Niger Delta region of Nigeria. Their right to water continues to be violated as they are forced to drink dangerously polluted water or buy water at unaffordable prices.

The multinational oil company Shell and the government of Rivers State, in southern Nigeria, have failed to provide residents in Ogale, an area outside of the state capital, Port Harcourt, with a regular source of safe water. Most people must either buy water or drink groundwater, which a United Nations study published in 2011 found to be dangerously contaminated.

The *United National Environment Programme's (UNEP)* study found that residents of Ogale were drinking water from wells contaminated with benzene, a known carcinogen, at over 900 times above the international guideline, which was "certain to lead to long-term health consequences". UNEP recommended that the Nigerian government take immediate action to stop people from drinking water from contaminated wells in Ogale and provide people with an alternative source of safe water. Despite this urgent call, people still lack access to such a source.

Amnesty International visited Ogale and interviewed residents on 1 September 2018. Most of the residents interviewed are buying water for personal and domestic use such as drinking, cooking and bathing, even though they cannot afford to. Residents must spend money on water, which in some cases amounted to a third of their weekly income, and say they sometimes eat two meals a day instead of three. Those who cannot afford to buy water drink and use local groundwater, despite the signs warning them that it is dangerous for their health. Some people drink water from local wells and boreholes even if an oily sheen is visible on top. In some cases, people are paying for the water from boreholes. Others use rainwater that contains small black flakes. Residents have no other choice when they cannot afford to purchase water from private vendors and the government has not made safe water available for over a year. Coinciding with Amnesty International's visit to Ogale, some of the government taps came back on. But residents say this is only for one hour a day in the morning or the afternoon and the quantity of water provided is not sufficient to meet their basic water needs. Amnesty International has reason to believe that the water fails to meet the World Health Organisation's Guidelines for drinking water quality.

1) TAKE ACTION

Write a letter, send an email, call, fax or tweet:

- Urging the Rivers State government and the Federal Ministry of Water Resources to take necessary steps to expedite the repair of the Eleme Regional Water Supply Project. Until this is done, they must immediately provide sufficient and safe water to affected communities who currently lack it, including by trucking it in if necessary;
- Calling on them to urgently carry out a health assessment of the Ogale Community and others that have been forced to continue to drink polluted water;
- Calling on Shell to disclose the steps it is taking to ensure that communities, which continue to be affected by oil contamination from its pipelines, have access to safe water for personal and domestic uses.

Contact these two officials by 8 November 2018:

Governor Nyesom Wike
Office of the Governor
Governor's House, Rivers State
Port Harcourt, Nigeria
Salutation: Your Excellency

Ambassador Sylvanus Adiewere Nsofor, Embassy of the Federal Republic of Nigeria
3519 International Court, NW
Washington, DC 20008
Tel: (202) 800 7201 | Fax: (202) 775-1385
Email: info@nigeriaembassyusa.org -OR-
ambassadoronsofor@nigeriaembassyusa.org
Contact Form: <https://bit.ly/2N9Hp6f>
Salutation: Dear Ambassador

2) LET US KNOW YOU TOOK ACTION

[Click here](#) to let us know if you took action on this case! *This is Urgent Action 172.18*

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Every year there are hundreds of oil spills in the Niger Delta – Africa's most valuable oil producing region. These spills have a devastating impact on the fields, forests and fisheries that the majority of the people in the region depend on for their food and livelihoods. Neither the powerful actors in the oil industry, nor the Nigerian government, have yet been able to put into practice lasting solutions that prevent the spills, and then clean them up effectively.

UNEP's ground-breaking 2011 report was the most comprehensive study to date of the impact that oil pollution has had on the communities living in the Niger Delta. Focusing on just one region, Ogoniland, UNEP exposed an appalling level of pollution, including the contamination of agricultural land and fisheries, the contamination of drinking water, and the exposure of hundreds of thousands of people to serious health risks. UNEP documented serious pollution and, the multinational oil company, Shell's failure to properly clean up oil spills at more than 60 locations. Shell has publicly said that, since 2011, it has addressed the pollution documented by UNEP, but research by Amnesty International and the local organisation, Centre for the Environment, Human Rights and Development (CEHRD) contradict Shell's claims.

As part of the environmental audit, UNEP sampled groundwater. At 28 wells in 10 communities, UNEP found hydrocarbon contamination. At seven wells the samples contained hydrocarbons at least 1000 times higher than the Nigerian drinking water standard. The contamination at Nisisioken Ogale was found to be the worst. The site is next to an abandoned Nigerian National Petroleum Company (NNPC) pipeline, which had leaked refined oil. Although at the time of the environmental audit, the spill was reported to have happened over six years ago and the pipeline had since been abandoned, UNEP found 8cm of oil floating on the groundwater surface at the point of the leak.

UNEP stated that 'anyone consuming water from these wells will have been exposed to unacceptable levels of the pollutant.' The UNEP report also recognised that the wells that had been sampled were 'probably not the only community wells with high levels of contamination, meaning that there is a high risk to the community of benzene poisoning from water taken from the wells for drinking.' Pollution was present both in wells and boreholes, as both come from a single groundwater source.

Immediately following the UNEP report, the Rivers State Government and Shell, the main oil operator in the region, began delivering water by truck to Ogale and then constructed a pipeline, which when finished in 2013 brought water to the community. The water was only ever supplied sporadically and in inadequate amounts. By 2017 government supplied water had stopped coming altogether.

In 2013, Amnesty International documented continued pollution in Okuluebu in Ogale where pipelines belonging to Shell and the NNPC run through in parallel.

The human right to water entitles everyone to sufficient, safe, acceptable, physically accessible and affordable water for personal and domestic uses.

Name: The residents of Olga
Gender m/f: All

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