

MEDIA ADVISORY
Friends of the Earth International

January 12, 2009

NIGERIA PRESSURED TO STOP OIL COMPANIES FROM FLARING GAS

LAGOS (NIGERIA), BRUSSELS (BELGIUM), January 12, 2009 – While Europe faces gas shortages, Friends of the Earth International is putting the Nigerian government under pressure to ensure that oil companies stop flaring Nigerian gas.

Following a December 31, 2008 deadline to end harmful gas flaring in Nigeria, Friends of the Earth International started today a letter writing campaign - directed at the Nigerian President - asking the Nigerian government to prevent oil companies from continuing to flare gas. Anglo-Dutch oil giant Shell is the largest producer of gas and oil in Nigeria.

Gas is often found mixed with crude oil, and must be separated. The cheapest way to deal with the gas is also the most environmentally destructive way: burning it. This practice costs the African country about US\$2.5 billion annually, while more than 66% of the population is estimated to live in poverty.

“Major oil companies are flaring gas in the oil-rich Niger Delta despite the fact that a Nigerian judge stated that flaring is illegal. Led by oil giant Shell, they have been burning gas for decades when they could be using it to provide energy to the local population. The government must ensure that oil companies stop this destructive practice now,” said Nnimmo Bassey, Friends of the Earth International chair and Friends of the Earth Nigeria Executive Director.

Nigeria is one of the world's biggest gas flarers. Nigerian gas flares emit as many greenhouse gases as 18 millions cars, and release toxic substances in densely populated areas, damaging both the environment and the people in the Niger Delta. Flaring can lead to leukaemia, asthma and premature death. It causes acid rain which acidifies lakes and streams and damages the environment.

The Nigerian Federal Government recently pledged to halt gas flares in Nigeria and set December 31st, 2008 as the zero flare date. For the first time it also raised the prospect of punitive action for any breach.

The first attempt at forcing oil corporations operating in the Niger Delta to end flares was in 1969 when the administration of General Yakubu Gowon ordered them to put in place facilities to utilise associated gas within five years.

“Pressure on the Nigerian government to end gas flaring once and for all is mounting. The government must enforce its deadline and ensure the end of flaring. Local people have waited long enough. All oil companies, including Shell, should simply comply with Nigerian law” said Paul de Clerck, Corporates Campaigner for Friends of the Earth International.

In order to 'greenwash' its image and distract the public from its dirty track record in Nigeria and elsewhere, Shell engages in partnerships with organisations such as the International Union for Conservation of Nature, or IUCN. The Shell-IUCN partnership takes place despite the fact that most members of IUCN are opposed to the agreement. To protest this partnership, and to draw attention to Shell's dirty track record, Friends of the Earth International decided to leave the IUCN. [2]

In 2007 the oil giant earned record-breaking annual profits of US\$ 31.3 billion, a massive 23% increase from 2006.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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IMAGES: High resolution images are online here: <http://www.foei.org/images/gas-flares>

FOOTAGE: Watch Poison Fire, a stunning documentary on oil and gas abuse in Nigeria at

<http://uk.youtube.com/watch?v=bq2TBOHWFRc>

For more information see www.poisonfire.org

NOTES:

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More information on gas flaring in Nigeria is contained in a 2005 report published by the Climate Justice Programme and Environmental Rights Action, 'Gas Flaring in Nigeria: A human rights, environmental and economic monstrosity', which is available here: www.foei.org/en/publications/pdfs/gasnigeria.pdf

[2]

The Friends of the Earth International letter to the International Union for Conservation of Nature is online here: <http://www.foei.org/en/publications/pdfs/iucn-withdrawal>