



CURBING THE MENACE OF OIL THEFT IN NIGERIA

The National President of PENGASSAN Festus Osifo recently disclosed at the meeting of the Senate Committee investigation into Oil lifting that the Oil theft currently going on in the country is a collaborative crime between the Military personnel assigned to protect Oil installations and the locals running illegal refineries. He alleged that that the Military and other security agencies were aiding and abetting criminals to steal the crude with the active connivance of the Regulatory Agencies in charge of the Nation's petroleum industry. He specifically alleged that the men of the Amphibious Brigade in Port Harcourt and their counterparts in the Navy in connivance with superior officers at different times joined the locals in the theft. According to Osifo, 'One of the greatest problem we have which nobody has highlighted is that there is strong connivance of our security forces in the crime. There is no doubt about this from our Army to our Navy officers as we have information that they pay their superiors handsomely to post them to some areas in the Niger Delta'. This fact can be corroborated from the recent past the Executive Governor of Rivers State, His Excellency, Governor Nyesom Wike raised an alarm that some Army Generals are involved in Oil bunkering and Oil Theft. Many then thought it was a statement made to score cheap political points or blackmail. But happenings today have proved otherwise.

Also during the Senate Committee meeting the Executive Commissioner Corporate Services and administration in Nigeria Upstream Petroleum Regulatory Commission (NUPRC) Mr. Jide Adeola disclosed that about 600,000 barrels of crude were stolen per day. According to him, 'As at today Nigeria produces 1.23million barrels of crude Oil per day as against 1.8 million barrels targeted leading to a total revenue loss of \$2.1billion or N877 billion. What a whopping sum of money been lost daily to criminals and Oil thieves.

The fact that these disclosures were made by some of the stakeholders in the petroleum industry is a pointer to the fact that these allegations cannot be far from the truth. This brings to mind a lot of questions that are begging for answers. The first is the Military involvement. It is most unlikely that the Military as an institution is directly involved in this Oil Theft but it has been clearly established that the collaboration is between the Military men (Army and Navy) and other security Agencies assigned to protect the Oil installations and the locals. This must be a statement of fact because no single drop of crude can move without the knowledge of the security officials watching over the Oil installations. So for Oil theft to occur there must be agreement and settlement between the thieves and the gate keepers who are the security agencies.

The Military men at the Amphibious Brigade in Port Harcourt and their counterpart at the Navy have been directly accused as culpable in the theft Oil racketing. For this to stop

the Military Authority at the Abuja headquarters must wade in as this amount to economic sabotage of the highest order. This is because it will amount to double standard and a compromise if some military men are being accused of participating in economic sabotage of such monumental magnitude and the Military Authority in Abuja seemed to be doing nothing to bring them to book. Some officials of the Regulatory Agencies are also being fingered as part of those responsible for Oil theft. This invariably means that the hands of Government officials are involve in the crude Theft. This is why Mr. President who till date is the Minister of Petroleum and Mr. Timipre Sylva who is the Minister of State for Petroleum Resources must as a matter of priority and urgency stamp their feet on the ground to ensure that top officials of the regulatory agencies who are conniving with the Oil thieves are identified and prosecuted. Anything short of this could the send wrong signals of official Government complicity in the Oil Theft theory as many Nigerians believed that those really involved in Oil theft are government officials and those at the top.

The Ministry of Petroleum Resources must carry out effective supervision of the new specialized entities such as the Nigeria Upstream Petroleum Regulatory Authority and the Midstream and Downstream Petroleum Regulatory Authority (NMDPR) to ensure that their clear mandates and statutory powers to handle specific responsibilities in their respective sphere of regulatory influence are not abused are not abused nor compromised. Also the Joint Task Force (JTF) comprising security officers from all the relevant security forces should be more patriotic and committed to the total eradication of illegal artisanal refineries in the Niger Delta Region. The recently launched Crude Theft Monitoring Application and the Lease Automatic Custody Transfer Meters should be properly deployed to check flow and pressure rates and to generally improve measuring capabilities.

In the same vein the ongoing multi-Agency collaboration involving the Central Bank of Nigeria, Nigeria Export Processing Zones Authority, Nigeria National Petroleum Company Limited, NUPRC, NPDMA, Nigeria Ports Authority, Ports Health Authority, Nigeria Immigration Service, Shipment Inspection Units should be strengthened and invigorated to put an end to the menace of Oil theft in Nigeria. It is not enough for all these big names to come together to synergize but the important thing is that Nigerians want to see results

All hands must be on deck to rescue the nation from the hand of all these criminals and economic saboteurs who have fleeced Nigerians and the Nation trillions of Monies that would have been channeled into meaningful developments.