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;"C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 LAGOS 000605

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STATE FOR AF/W
STATE FOR DS/IP/AF
STATE FOR INR/AA

E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/25/2015
TAGS: NI, PGOV, PHUM, PREL
SUBJECT: MILITANT DELTA YOUTH SET ASIDE ARMS AND DIFFERENCES

REF: 04 ABUJA 1715

Classified By: Consul General [naam verwijderd] for Reasons 1.4 (D & E)

1. (C) Summary: Over the past few months, the Government of Nigeria and NGOs convened two major "peace camps" bringing together members of rival militia groups and gangs from the Delta region. The camps were largely in response to the flare up in violence which occurred in the region Fall 2004. During the camps, a constant theme among participants was frustration at perceived GON backpedaling on promises made in exchange for the youth to stop their illegal activities. As gang and cult leaders aim to secure their power bases, they plan candidacy in local government elections. If GON response to collective pressure by the youth is not positive, they threaten a return to violence.

Militant Youth Forge Alliances at Peace Camps

2. (C) Two conflict management camps brought together members of armed militia groups and rival gangs to draft action plans based upon the peace deal brokered Fall 2004 (reftel). The camps were part of the implementation of the Peace and Security Strategy (PaSS), drafted by non-governmental organizations (NGOs) working on Delta issues. Leaders from militia groups, gangs, and cults and the Rivers State Government (with the blessing of President Obasanjo), agreed to the PaSS as a concrete way to solidify the peace. The PaSS provides a roadmap for youth rehabilitation, detailing specific roles for key stakeholders including NGOs, the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC), the federal, state, and local government, civil society, corporations, and the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC). Oil companies have indicated willingness to assist its implementation, but the government has rebuffed their entreaties. To date, aside from the camps, there has been little progress on the PaSS.

3. (C) The January camp convened 750 combatants from two major militia groups. Most participants were from Alhaji Dokubo Asari's Niger Delta Peoples Volunteer Force (NDPVF) or Ateke Tom's Niger Delta Vigilante Group (NDVG). The February camp convened 340 Ogoni youth, many were members of either NDPVF or NDVG, to discuss intra-Ogoni conflicts. (Note: The

Ogoni received international media attention when Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP) leader Ken Saro-Wiwa and eight others were executed by former military leader Sani Abacha.) The Ogoni Youth Peace and Development Camp was sponsored with joint funding from Shell Petroleum Development Corporation (N13 million - approximately USD 100,000) and the Rivers State Government (N6 million - approximately USD 46,000). Local government officials appointed 36 of the participants to the February camp. Among these participants, there were 15 girls and 10 facilitators who previously attended the January camp. Each camp was held for one week in Jos, Plateau State and focused on conflict management, leadership training, and community development.

Pervasive Violence and Conflict Offer Youth Few Options

4. (C) Poloff attended part of the February Ogoni-focused camp. When she arrived, rumors about its funding were circulating wildly. After the participants learned Shell had contributed to the camp, they demanded an increase in their stipends and feeding allowances. Tensions culminated mid-morning with a food riot where youth stormed the kitchen, breaking windows, pushing one of the women hired as a caterer into the cooking fire and slapping another. With empty stomachs, the participants finally cooled off with a game of soccer before the afternoon seminars, a meal, and the cultural event of the evening.

5. (C) Participants in both camps expressed a desire to renounce militia, cult, and gang membership but indicated the violence in the region and lack of alternative options kept them in these groups. Many shared their stories, including one who said he had been personally involved in over thirty murders. They expressed extreme disappointment at being exploited by the politicians who paid them for rigging the 2003 elections. The young men identified more intensely with local cults and gangs and were only secondarily affiliated with either the NDPVF or the NDVG -- working for them on an ad hoc almost contractual basis. Neither Asari nor Tom have a significant standing force. To muster bodies, both men have to negotiate with and cajole (often battling) cults and gangs, organized at the community level.

Plan Invites Oil Companies' Return to Ogoniland

6. (C) The Action Plan developed at the Ogoni Youth Camp includes eight proposed activities to encourage reconciliation and peace, enhance youth development, generate employment opportunities, and improve education. A top priority is to facilitate oil exploration in Ogoniland, reversing the hiatus after Shell pulled out in 1994. Shell ceased production and removed their workers after a four-year military occupation resulted in over 1000 deaths. With the withdrawal of the oil companies, the sale and trade of weapons, drugs, and bunkered oil have been the most lucrative income-generating activities. The youth at the peace camp

stated they want Shell to return and would do what is necessary to facilitate the oil company's presence. (Comment: Senior level Shell and MOSOP officials have told us they are "close" to reaching agreement but stress the agreement would only be able to re-open dialogue, not to immediately re-start operations. End Comment.)

Youth Increasingly Frustrated as GON Backpedals on Promises

7. (C) Contacts working with the peace deal tell us that none of the promised government programs have been implemented -- no further camps have been funded, and there has been little progress on the scholarships, micro-credit and other youth empowerment strategies. Even previous initiatives have lost their momentum. [tekst verwijderd]

One Success Story

9. (C) Collaboration around security issues was initiated when the Rivers State Chief of Security (COS) sent several State Security Service (SSS) agents to the peace camp. The SSS acted as instructors, working with the "Discipline Committee" (largely made up of gang leaders implicated in most of the violence) to ease conflicts within the camp and address issues of conflict management in more general terms. Successful cooperation was evident when after the camp, a young man called [naam verwijderd] to warn of vandalism and a planned fire on one of Shell's pipelines. [naam verwijderd] quickly contacted the company and the COS who immediately went to the location, diffused the situation, and averted the attack - a successful early warning that would not have occurred but for the camp.

Youth Mobilize Communities for Political Aspirations

10. (C) As a whole, the participants are disillusioned by the political process. They feel deeply betrayed after being dropped by the politicians they helped during the 2003 elections. Many were not paid as promised for their "security services" to politicians in and beyond the Delta. One camp participant, known as being particularly dangerous, described how in 2003 and 2004, he was hired to bring his thuggery to bear in the political turmoil in Anambra State as well.

11. (C) Cult group and gang leaders have indicated they now want to run for office. After recognizing politics is a lucrative business, militia leaders are mobilizing to contest local government elections. One contact explained the electoral power totem pole where cult members aspire to become local government counselors, then local government chair and then a representative at the state or federal level. They only want elected positions because these have direct access to funds. Cult-based or gang-based influence could be transformed into political mobilization at the

community level. This transition in occupational focus does not seem to be a new beginning but just a graduation of ambition within the old system, where money and violence are the controlling factors. From what we can see, many of the "new politicians" are using for themselves the muscular tactics they practiced for others during the 2003 election.

Comment

12. (C) Measured against modest parameters of getting contending youth to sit down with each other, the camps were successful. However, they represent the making of a small brake on a large wheel. The camps present a glimpse of possible positive development but do not mask the violent and mercenary political sub-culture of the Delta. Strong government participation and active public-private partnerships are needed to throttle the negative dynamic. Youth camp organizers and other NGO representatives tell us that violence in the Delta region is just over the horizon, as youth are becoming restive -- frustrated about being used by politicians and now feeling abandoned because the GON has not honored its recent pledges. The youth say they have given up their cult activities and oil bunkering and have received nothing in return. Unless greater assistance is provided, the youth will return to their old form and the likelihood of renewed tension will only increase.

[naam verwijderd]
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PGOV (Internal Governmental Affairs)
PHUM (Human Rights)
PREL (External Political Relations)
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