

NGEKOMEN 16 DEC. 2004

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cc MA + Allen
re: Kari SL

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Voorzitter van de Europese Raad
Ministerie van Algemene Zaken
Binnenhof 19
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Mr S. Langeveld
Director, Both ENDS
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1018 VC Amsterdam

No.: 04MM470421

The Hague, 14 December 2004

Dear Mr Langeveld,

First let me thank you for your letter of 17 November 2004 on the situation in the Delta area of South Nigeria, in particular the rainforests in Cross River State.

You were quite right to draw our attention to the problems of Cross River State, especially with regard to the natural environment. This state – and indeed the entire Delta region – faces a number of very serious, interrelated problems. It was for this reason that the European Union, led by the Dutch ambassador in Abuja, sent a mission to the area, both to learn more about the conditions in the Delta and to send a signal to the Nigerian authorities that the European Union is most concerned about the situation. The report of the mission – which is confidential – was discussed in the Africa Working Group of the European Union in Brussels on 9 and 10 November 2004. The Group agreed on all the recommendations of the EU Heads of Mission in Abuja.

The mission to the Niger Delta region and the recommendations of the EU ambassadors focused on political and socioeconomic issues, not environmental problems. Nevertheless, it is clear that the problems in the area are interconnected, so that it made sense to include environmental degradation as an issue in our discussions with Nigeria during the Senior Officials Meeting between the EU and Nigeria on 8 December in The Hague.

I am confident that you will understand that we could only address the issue in a general sense, since no specific development projects are discussed at these meetings. Moreover, the EU is not in a position to intervene in the relationship between the Nigerian authorities and foreign companies owned by nationals of a country like China, which is not a member of the OECD. As you will undoubtedly know, the OECD has drafted guidelines on corporate social responsibility for the companies of its member states.

It is clear that improving governance receives special emphasis among the European Union's objectives with regard to Nigeria – and indeed with regard to Africa in general. Protecting the environment and promoting good governance are two established priorities of EU development cooperation with Nigeria. In Cross River State, support from the European Union helped to set up the Nigeria-Cameroon transfrontier Oban Hills National Park and the Okwangwo National Park, and the EU is currently supporting the implementation of governance reforms. Proper stewardship and management of the natural environment, in accordance with national law and internationally accepted standards, are certainly facets of good governance. Therefore, in the context of the EU's cooperative endeavours in Nigeria, which aim to promote good governance, improve transparency and combat corruption, we firmly support the national government's efforts to ensure compliance with and enforcement of legislation on the environment throughout the country, particularly in vulnerable areas and in states where the ties between the EU and Nigeria have traditionally been strong.

The issue of governance was discussed at length at the meeting on 8 December. The dispute between the governor of Cross River State and the foreign company was mentioned, but the Nigerian delegation did not respond to these remarks during the meeting, probably because it had no further information about the matter. It is possible they will look into it once they get back to Nigeria. Moreover, the Dutch embassy in Abuja will be monitoring the situation.

In closing, I would like to wish you every success in your efforts to preserve the rainforests in the Niger Delta.

Yours sincerely,



Dr. Jan Peter Balkenende
President of the European Council