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Chevron Trial: We're optimistic the Ilaje will get justice, says ERA

The Ilaje people are optimistic that Chevron Nigeria Limited (CNL) will be brought to book for instigating the murder of Ilaje youths who were on a peaceful protest on Parabe platform, Ondo State, in 1998.

Environmental Rights Action/Friends of the Earth, Nigeria (ERA/FoEN), in a reaction to the conclusion of deliberations by the jury sitting in a San Francisco, US district court on whether Chevron is liable for the May 1998 killings, said the much-awaited verdict will make history "since all the testimonies vindicate the Ilaje Community people who have endured a decade of legal roadblocks by Chevron spin doctors intending to stall the case."

The Ilaje youths had embarked on a peaceful protest to the platform to demand a better deal from Chevron for years of unfriendly environmental practices during oil extraction, lacking basic amenities and scholarships for youths, and unemployment in spite of hosting Chevrons operational office, among others.

On being assured that their grievances were being addressed with elders of their respective communities, the youths were getting ready to live the platform when suddenly they came under attack from the Nigerian security forces that arrived the platform on a chopper.

The incident necessitated the current suit filed in 1999 at the San Francisco district court by survivors and representatives of the communities - Messrs Larry Bowoto, Bola Oyibo (late), Bassey Jeje and Sunday Johnbul.

In a recent ruling, Judge Susan Illston of the San Francisco district court rejected Chevron's final attempt to avoid trial, insisting that "Chevron Nigeria Limited personnel were directly involved in the attacks; transported the Nigerian security forces, paid the security forces and knew that the security forces were prone to use of excessive force";

"The facts are overwhelming. This is the time for justice. The innocent people of Ilaje land and the whole world is watching with keen optimism because a ruling in favor of justice will send a strong signal to Chevron and its co-travelers in the oil industry that evil committed against a single human being anywhere in the world will one day be addressed in the public and perpetrators prosecuted," said Executive Director of ERA/FoEN, Nnimmo Bassey.

"The entire history of crude oil extraction in Nigeria has been strewn with dollars for the corporation and politicians but tears and blood for local people. Chevron must account for its unrelenting acts of brutality against the defenseless people of the Niger Delta region";

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