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# Nigeria: Oil companies blamed, amid pollution reports

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Nigeria companies have escaped large compensation fees for oil spills in the Niger Delta region by blaming thieves for the environmental problems. Amnesty International's report, which follows another environmental report released by Green Cross and Blacksmith Institute, has been rejected by the country's oil companies.

Amnesty International's report

indicates that corroded pipes belonging to oil companies are the cause of oil spills in the region.

The release follows the publication of the Ten Most Polluted Places 2013, compiled by Green Cross, a Swiss-based independent environmental organisation, and US-based Blacksmith Institute.

The Green Cross report indicates that about 7,000 incidents involving millions of barrels of oil spills - of which over 70% was never recovered - occurred in Nigeria's Niger Delta between 1976 and 2001.

"Groundwater and soil have been heavily polluted in the process, which has also devastated aquatic and agricultural communities", Green Cross reports.

Amnesty's study of Nigeria's oil spill revealed Royal Dutch Shell and other large oil companies were responsible for the spills.

For example, Amnesty found that there were 474 spills in 2012 in one area alone, operated by a subsidiary of ENI- an Italian oil firm.

However, ENI, Shell and other major oil companies embarked on their own research together with local government

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officials and locals to investigate oil spills.

The Joint Investigation Visit (JIV) headed by the large oil companies concluded that sabotage and oil theft were responsible for the oil spills.

ENI, Shell and other companies have rejected Amnesty's findings, and put out a statement arguing that oil theft "remains the main cause of oil pollution in the Delta."

"Co-ordinated action from the industry, government, security forces, civil society and others is needed to end this criminality, which remains the main cause of oil pollution in the Delta today," Shell said in statement.

JIV's findings means affected communities miss out on compensation.

Amnesty rejected the JIV findings calling it unreliable and non-transparent.

"Sabotage and theft of oil are serious problems in the Niger Delta," Amnesty said in a statement.

"However, international oil companies are overstating the case in an effort to deflect attention away from the many oil spills that are due to corrosion and equipment failure.

"Moreover, securing oil infrastructure against such acts is - to a substantial extent - the responsibility of the operator."

Available statistics show that in the last 30 years more than 400,000 tons of oil have spilled into the creeks and soils of southern Nigeria.

Shell has been the biggest foreign investor in Nigeria, operating a joint venture that accounts for about 40 percent of the West African country's oil production.

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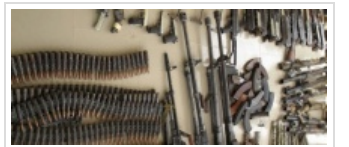
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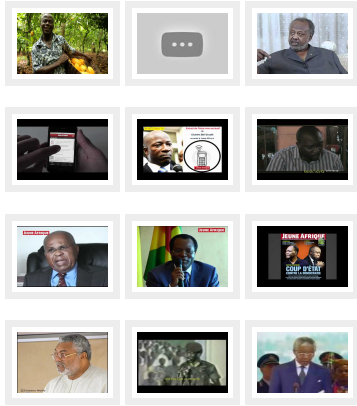
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