

## **PROLIFERATION OF SMALL ARMS AND LIGHT WEAPONS IN NIGER DELTA: A THREAT TO NATIONAL SECURITY IN NIGERIA**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Proliferations of small arms and light weapons have been a stricken issue in the international agenda since 1998. It is a pace of activity that has eaten deep into the survival of emerging nations in the International scene, especially in Africa. It is a phenomenon that is destabilizing the peace, development and threatens the national security of sovereign states. There is growing international apprehension on the emerging trends in Niger Delta region of Nigeria. Niger Delta is a geographical description of an area and people who settle in the South South of Nigeria. It is the treasure base of Nigeria. It produces about eighty percent of Nigeria foreign exchange earnings. Though, ever since her independence in 1960, the people of the area have been involved in agitations against marginalization, neglect, insensitivity to their difficult terrain and lack of development both human and infrastructural. The 'proliferation of arms and light weapons within the Niger Delta is becoming a threat to national security in Nigeria, and the price of crude oil in the world market. Arms proliferation has increased criminality, youth violence, hostage taking, militancy, community crises, oil bunkering, escalated the Niger Delta crises, and posed threat to peace and security in Nigeria. This paper examined the sources of small arms and light weapons into the area x-rayed the motivational forces behind the proliferation. Federal Government initiatives to curb these menace; and proffered solution that can curb the proliferation of SALW in the Niger Delta region.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Proliferation of small arms and light weapons has been a stricken issue in the international agenda since 1998. It is a pace of activity that is eating deep into the survival of emerging nation in the international scene especially in Africa. It is a phenomenon that is destabilizing the peace, development and threatening the national security of sovereign nation. In Nigeria, the Inspector- General of Police Mr. Mike Okiro recently ordered the deployment of about 500 policemen to the nation's territorial boundaries to check the unlawful act of arms proliferation. In other to make the initiative successful, the I.G. promised officers who discover arms or arrest suspects would be

compensated (Punch, Sept. 26, 2008. p. 14). Last year (2007) the Nigeria Merchant Navy Corps raised alarm over the continual importation of illegal arms and ammunition into the country through the high seas from other neighboring countries. Early in the month of September 2008, the Nigeria customs service (NCS) intercepted and seized a cache of arms concealed in a 40 feet container, along with three vehicles during a routing physical examination of containers at the Tin Can Port in Lagos. It was alleged that the Lagos waterways may have become entry points for illegal arms and ammunition into the country. The escalation of the Niger Delta crisis in Nigeria has raised the stake of proliferation of small arms and light weapons to an alarming rate. The Minister of State for Defence, Dr. Rowland Oritsejafor recently said, that the volume of illegal arms in circulation in the Niger Delta was disturbing to the federal government and warned that the situation could lead to instability. He further said that we don't want to deceive ourselves, no matter what the quantity is; no matter how small as long as it is in the wrong hands, it is a threat to our security. Though, there is a growing international apprehension on the emerging trends in the Niger Delta struggle. Niger Delta is a geographical description of an area and people who settle in the south south of Nigeria. It is the treasure base of Nigeria. It produces about eighty (80%) percent of Nigeria foreign exchange earnings. Though, ever since the independence of Nigeria in 1960, the people of the area have been involved in agitation against marginalization, neglect, insensitivity to their difficult terrain and lack of development both human and infrastructural. The proliferation of arms and light weapons within the Niger Delta is becoming a threat to National Security in Nigeria and price of world crude oil market. Arms proliferation has increased criminality, youth violence, hostage taking, militancy, community crises, drug abuse, oil bunkering and threat to peace and security in Nigeria.

### **Nature of Problem**

Niger Delta is a centre of protracted discontent among impoverished communities who felt neglected, marginalized and cheated out of the region's oil and gas wealth by the federal government and oil companies. In retrospect, in 1957, the Rivers Chiefs and People delegated Chief Harold Dappa Biriye to, represent Rivers Chiefs and People" in which they clamored for a protectorate of Rivers State of Nigeria to the Nigerian

constitutional conference in London. Their request was not granted. In February 1966, a small group of Ijaw activists through the Niger Delta volunteer force led by Isaac Adaka Boro, Sam Owunari, and Nettingham Dick attempted to secede the Niger Delta region from Nigeria through the force of arms and; proclaimed the Niger Delta a Republic (Tebekaemi, 1982). However, their insurgency was short-lived as it was crushed by the federal troops after 12 days. In the 1990s, the late environmental and Human right activist, Kenule. Sarowiwa the foremost leader of the Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People (MOSOP), agitated for more access to the region's oil wealth and protested the under development of Ogoni land and her people by the federal government and oil companies. He was later condemned to death by a government judicial tribunal under the administration of late General Sani Abacha. Thereafter this provoking killing of Sarowiwa, there was an upsurge of youth resistance groups who organized a clandestine Kaiyama declaration were the emergence of youth violence which later metamorphosed to militant groups and the use of violence in the prosecution of the Niger Delta struggle kick started. The militant started by kidnapping expatriates of oil and gas workers for ransom. In the kidnap, different nationals of the world were victims' hence, it became a global concern. The danger now is that, the militants are not limited to kidnapping expatriates nor oil and gas workers alone but, have extended this horrendous experience to public officers, their children, wife and parents. Their actions make them common criminals, which is not the path of the elite struggle for a better Niger Delta. The proliferation of small arm and light weapons in the Niger Delta' area is a strong factor in encouraging youth restiveness, hostage taking and various other crimes in the region. Residents in the area resort to gun over minor communal disputes, leading to ever increasing' insecurity that manifests as: drug addiction and trafficking, gangsterism, hostage taking, armed robbery and sea piracy on the region innumerable water ways and creeks and illicit oil marketing (oil-bunkering). These weapons have endeared the restive youth to confront federal troops thereby creating further insecurity and threat to sovereignty. Another serious area of concern is the bunkering of crude oil i.e. illicit trade on oil (which resort to exchange of arms for oil at the higher sea. This paper will probe into the sources of small' arms and light weapons into Niger Delta, Motivational forces behind proliferation of arms. Effects of the proliferation on National security, federal

Government initiatives and suggest ways of curbing proliferation of arms in Niger Delta. This paper shall not delve on the Niger Delta struggle/conflict, rather on the role played by the proliferation of arms in not only exacerbating the tension in the region and perpetuating the prevailing climate of insecurity in Nigeria, but how to curb these proliferations of arms. It is the objective of this paper to usher in peace and understanding in the area, positively influence Nigeria disarmament policy particularly on SALW, effect a positive change in National policies related to arms control, improve human and material security through the control and management of SALW both at Niger Delta and Nigerian at large. It is the objective of this study too to increase awareness on the danger posed by the proliferation of small arms and light weapons in Niger Delta and Nigeria by extension.

### **CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION**

For a better understanding of this paper, the definition of small arms and light weapons has to be explained precisely. Although there is no universally accepted definition of these terms, the report of the United Nations panel of Government Experts on small arms in 1997 (<http://disarmament.un.org/cab/smallarms/docs/rep52298.pdf>) gives the most widely accepted definition:

- \* Small arms and light weapons range from clubs, knives and matchet, to those weapons just bellow those covered by the United Nations Register of Conventional Arms, for example, mortars below the caliber of 100mm. The small arms and light weapons which are of main concern for the purpose of the present paper are those which are manufactured to military specifications for use as lethal instruments of war.
- \* Small arms and light weapons are used by all armed forces, including internal security forces, for inter alia, self-protection or self-defense, close or short-range combat, direct or indirect fire, and against tank or aircraft at relatively short distances. Broadly speaking, small arms are those weapons for personal use, and light weapons are those designed for use by several persons serving as a crew."

In summary, the weapons studied in this study are the following:

- \* Small arms: Revolvers and self-loading guns, Rifles and Carbines, Sub-Machine-guns, Assault rifles, ' light machine-guns.
- \* Light weapons: Heavy machine guns, Hand-held under-barrel and mounted grenade launchers, portable anti-aircraft guns, portable anti-tank guns, portable launchers of anti-tank missiles and rocket systems, portable launches of anti-aircraft missiles systems, mortars of caliber less than 100mm.
- \* Ammunition and explosives: cartridges for small arms, shells and missiles for light weapons, mobiles contained with missiles or shells for single - action anti-aircraft and anti-tank systems, Anti-personnel and anti-tank hand grenades, land mines, Explosives.

The term "small arms and light weapons" (Onuoha, 2006) refers to any weapon that can be maneuvered and, manipulated by one or two persons. "Light weapons" comprise heavy machine-guns, mortars of up to 100mm, and portable anti-craft/aircraft systems, while the term "small arms" denotes a sub-category of light ; weapons comprising automatic/semi automatic weapons of up to 20mm (eg. Self loading pistols, revolvers, carbines, rifles and machine-guns). Ammunition and explosives are also subsumed under this term.

## **NIGER DELTA SCENARIO**

### **Location Constraints**

The Niger Delta area (70.00cm<sup>2</sup>) is a vast flood plain and one of the world's largest wetlands. It consists of a number of characteristics ecological zones: sandy coastal rainforest/ridge, barriers/brackish or saline mangroves; fresh water permanent and seasonal swamps and low land rain forest. The mangrove forest covers 54.000km<sup>2</sup> or 75% of the region. The area classified as a fragile ecosystem is influenced by the tides of the Atlantic Ocean and the flood of the River Niger. The constraints against the sustainable development of the Niger Delta are well known:

- A wetland region criss- crossed by a vast array of estuaries, rivers, creeks, creek lets, and vegetation:

- Consisting of mangrove species and freshwater forest growing on chicoco soils and mudflats. Upon this type of terrain is an imposed further serious environmental problem such as;
- Agricultural land degradation, flood erosion (coastal and river bank);
- Deforestation, biodiversity loss, fisheries habitat degradation, spills, accelerated seas level rise, mangrove degradation;
- Oil pollution/spills and water-hyacinth invasion, toxic and hazardous substances and sewage discharges on land and at sea, rivers, among others (World Bank, 1995 NDES, 1997, Amakiri 2004).

The above mentioned constraints pose a threat to the very existence of the Niger Delta people and make the area an "Endangered Environment". These communities are the real areas to invest in and develop to ensure that the dividends of any resources exploitation reach the grassroots. Because of all these, there are lack of infrastructures such as roads, portable water, and poverty, lack of good housing, telecommunication, and electricity, amongst others. This is the environment in which the Niger Delta people live, engaged in fishing, subsistence farming and as middlemen during the trades of the colonial era. Ironically, the fragile ecosystem has turned out to be also the strength of the Niger Delta.

## **RELEVANCE OF NIGER DELTA TO NIGERIA**

The Niger Delta comprising: Edo, Delta, Bayelsa, Rivers, Akwa Ibom and Cross Rivers States, is acknowledged as the bedrock of the economic foundation of the Nigerian Nation, being the nucleus of the oil and gas industry. The relevance of Niger Delta to the Nigerian Nation is summarized as follows:

### **Economic**

- Contributing more than eighty (80%) percent to the Nigerian economy through crude oil and gas production for export, therefore consequently provide more than 90% of the funds in the distribution pool of the Nation.

- Home to three refineries, petrochemical plants, fertilizer plants in the zone, and others not in the Niger Delta are from crude from the Niger Delta.
- Have huge agricultural, fisheries and forestry products.

### **Social**

- Its cultural heritage contributes to the rich cultural heritage of Nigeria.
- Its vast shoreline, mangrove and rain forest protect the Nation from ocean encroachment.
- It is the first line of defense against international aggression. In pre-colonial times, its local arms using indigenous weapons and locally carved boat fought wars on behalf of what is today Nigeria.
- Brave sea faring people.
- Peace loving and patriotic even in the face of criminal neglect by the rest of Nigeria. No other group in Nigeria would have agreed to continue to remain in Nigeria if a similar treatment were meted to them as it is being willfully done to the Niger Delta people.

### **It's Opportunities:**

Alongside the huge challenges, there are vast development opportunities identified by the Niger Development Commission (NDDC) in a number of sectors including:

- Primary Agricultural Production, with vast amounts of fallow cultivable land.
- Agricultural processing
- Livestock production and processing
- Solid Minerals and Mining
- Oil and Gas sector development (upstream and downstream)
- Fertilizer production
- Information and Communication Technology (ICT)
- Forestry
- Tourism, among others.

### **SOURCES OF SMALL ARMS AND LIGHT WEAPONS INTO NIGER DELTA**

The sources of small arms and light weapons into Niger Delta are: International, regional and local, it is.' trafficked through land and sea.

### **International Sources**

The cold war between the then Soviet Union and the United States of America forced a lot of illicit arms into; various third world countries, Nigeria was one of the victims, these arms were further reinforced during the Nigerian civil war. In one of her editorial, Punch Newspaper wrote that, it is regrettable that since the end of the civil war in 1970, all efforts to curb the proliferation of illegal arms and ammunition in the country have been largely unsuccessful (Punch, September 26, 2008 p. 14). There are international illegal arms dealers and sellers. Most of the assault rifles such as the Russian AK-47, then German G3, the Belgian FN-FAL, the, Czech Machine gun and the Serbian RPGs are supplied by illegal dealers and sellers (Wellington, 2007). He' further mentioned that Russia, Germany, Belgium, Serbia, Czechoslovakia, the United States and China are all sources for Nigerian arms (Niger Delta Standard, March 5, 2006). Jailed but released militant leader' Alhaji Dokubo-Asari confirmed this international sources of arms when he informed reporters that "we are very close to international waters, and its very easy to get weapons from ships" (IRIN, May 2006). European dealers are involved in this trade, but, unlike their Nigerian counterparts, they almost escape the arm of the law, in some cases due to their connections with powerful figures in various governments (This Day, February 18, 2003).

### **Regional Sources**

Nigeria has porous borders on both its land and sea edges, allowing gun smuggling from various African' Countries. In the West African sub-region (Onuoha, 2006), Guinea-Bissau, with a long history of being a reservoir for leftover Soviet - supplied weapons, is a key source of illegal trafficking into conflict zones in the sub-region. Weapons are also being transferred from the troubled states of the Mano River Basin into the Niger Delta. Smugglers from Gabon and Cameroon use high-speed boats to transport arms and ammunition from ships originating from Eastern Europe and Asia that anchor off the coast of West Africa (Ibid). SALW also come from war-ton countries in Africa to Niger Delta such as Liberia and Sierra Leone. Obafemi Ogudu an arms

researcher confirmed that, many of the arms smuggling rings operate out of Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Cameroon and Nigeria (IRIN, May 2006). The smugglers use speed boats to connect with ships on the high seas, and then ferry the arms back to shore. Boats carrying arms are reported to offload at Warri and Bonny, towns in the Delta and Rivers States of Nigeria. The weapons include semi-automatic rifles, shotguns, machine-guns, and shoulder-fired rockets (known as bazookas).

### **Local Sources:**

There are local gangs of arms manufactures within the country. The profitable nature of arms business, attracts some local manufactures to the business. In Awka, the Capital of Anambra State in eastern Nigeria, there are local blacksmiths that produce/manufacture weapons popularly called "Awka made". The Awka guns cannot be classified as automatic weapons because the quality of the weapons is poor nevertheless, the gun can kill at a close range. In 2004, the Nigerian police arrested an illegal arms manufacturer in Gusau, Zamfara State, along with seven (7) buyers of the illegal products. In April of the same year, the Oyo State, police command intercepted a lorry loaded with 105,000 live double barrel cartridges smuggled through the Saki border in Oyo State enroute to Onitsha in Anambra State. In 2007, the police in Niger State arrested a local blacksmith who specialized in selling arms to robbers and other customers at Pandogari village (Punch, September 26, 2008). The Rivers State police command arrested Chris Ndudi Nyoku, a 45 year-old businessman who specialized in importing prohibited fire arms into Nigeria. In his possession were hundreds of G3s, AK-47s and Beretta automatic rifles (Wellington, 2007). Corrupt security operatives are equally. Sources of arms supply to the Niger Delta. In January 2008, a superintendent of police, an inspector and three other policemen in the same department were arrested by the police for allegedly supplying police AK- 47 rifles to a gang of criminals. In the same month, fifteen army officers, three of them are colonels were implicated over alleged disappearance of a large quantity of arms and ammunition from the armory (Punch, September 26, 2008). In addition, poor paid Nigerian soldiers who have served in peacekeeping missions in other African countries such as Liberia and Sierra Leone, often return home and sell their weapons to combatants or gun dealers. Oil money is a significant force behind the proliferation of weapons in the region. Major bunkering

groups also supply guns with weapons and have them act as armed guards while they travel along the water ways and bunkering routes looking for pipelines from which to pilfer oil. Oil company funds are considerable sources of weapons in the Niger Delta, aside from bunkering, oil producing companies are not satisfied with state provision of security hence, for an adequate security of their facilities at the, high sea and hinterland, they employ the services of armed groups for private security and surveillance of the company's facilities. These groups use oil company funds to buy weapons, which overtime, enables them to expand the outreach of their activities across other communities and across state boundaries. Distribution of arms by political parties and politicians for the coercion and intimidation of opponents and the electorate at election times are sources of SAL W to the Niger Delta area. In the 2003 election, the deputy governor of a state in the Niger Delta was caught with eleven AK47 rifles in his car (Bebibiafai, 2007). Before the April 2007 Election, Politicians in Niger State imported massive amounts of arms for their "security detachments" (Vanguard April 13, 2007). The politicians arm their thugs to gain election victory. Thereafter, they cannot retrieve the arms from these thugs, the gun might end up in the hands of criminals or rebels who would turn the muzzles of these guns at the people, and later pose a threat to the politicians. The armed groups also attack police stations and army detachment outposts to cart away their arms. There are many cases in which armed groups conducted attacks and kill Nigerian security officials, casting away their weapons. On July 12, 2006, MEND combatants killed four naval personnel and injured three soldiers who were escorting a chevron oil tanker along Chonomi creeks in the Warri South West Local Government Area of Delta State and carted away their weapons (punch July 13, 2006). In Port Harcourt, the capital of Rivers State - one of the Niger Delta States, on the eve of the Governorship and House of Assembly election on April 14, 2006, armed militants attacked the Mini-Okoro Elemenwo police station, chased the policemen on duty away, and carted away recently-arrived AK-47, some police officers died during the attack (The Midweek Telegraph, April 18-24).

## **MOTIVATIONAL FORCES BEHIND THE PROLIFERATION**

Here, we shall examine the factors that cause or motivate the proliferation of small arms and light weapons in Niger Delta. Poverty all over the world is said to be a motivating condition for criminal activities. In the Niger Delta, there are lots of oil and gas exploration companies. Before now, these companies do not employ the people of their host communities; some are not sensitive to their social and community relations. They were not conscious of deliberately empowering the people from the area. According to the United Nations development programme report on the Niger Delta (Bebibiafai, P.5). "The Niger Delta region is suffering from administrative neglect, crumbling infrastructure and services, high unemployment, social deprivation, abject poverty, filth, squalor and endemic conflict". We should note that extreme circumstances make extremist, harsh environment produce harsh thought and harsh ways of doing things. It is further said that an idle mind is a devil's workshop. Most of these combatants may not be comfortable with their disposition but circumstances of poverty could lure or frustrate them into harsh and uncivilized thought and action. The federal Government though is showing concern by creating a ministry of Niger Delta; we hope this ministry will not be incapacitated by funds to deliver. Poverty has led to a militarized and militant youth population in Niger Delta, which has been known to kidnap oil workers and defy security agencies using their knowledge of the localities and their creeks; and their access to SALW is further exacerbating their criminal activities and posing a threat to National Security in Nigeria.

### **In Security and Privatization of Security**

Many Nigerians and corporate organizations have lost confidence in the state and its security agencies to guarantee security hence, individuals, groups and corporate bodies have to provide security for themselves through various means. These private securities and vigilantes are armed sometimes with illegal weapons. Arming of private security is part of the motivational forces for the proliferation of small arms and light weapons in Niger Delta. More so, the proliferation of SALW within the Niger Delta region gives concern to the individuals who arm themselves for self-defense and fear of the unknown. Inadequate control of our sea, territorial jurisdiction; The Nigerian territorial waters is 81,000 square nautical miles, which if translated to kilometers, comes to about 284,000

square kilometers. This is an equivalent of one-third of the local land surface of Nigeria (the Guardian, June 29, 2008). The Nigerian Navy do not have enough functional equipment to monitor and secure our porous water ways. It does not have complete control of her sea lanes and waterways. The Navy has only about ten (10) combat ships with about twelve (12) Defender boats, None of these ship is below thirty (30) years. She is inadequately equipped to police her sea lanes, therefore being incapacitated to monitor sea pirates and illegal oil bunkers'. She is inadequately equipped to patrol and: familiarize herself with the creeks and tributaries in Niger Delta. The porousness of our naval security; motivates illegal smugglers to bring in arms through our Territorial water with impunity. It is therefore~ believed that the naval force is incapable of protecting the economic interest of Nigeria, her oil and gas; pipelines in the sea, including oil company workers and their properties/facilities in the high sea. Underdevelopment of Niger Delta is a motivational force for the proliferation of small arms and light weapons in the region. The people of the Niger Delta are living under a very harsh condition. Outside most state capitals in the Niger Delta, there is nothing to write home about. Most towns and villages of Niger Deltas do not have electricity, schools, and health clinics, even portable drinking water is scarce. They lack roads' and link roads, good houses, poor communication network, poor transportation system, education facilities and a poor and hazardous environment. The educational sector of Niger Delta is highly, unproductive. The teachers in all tier of the educational Sector, primary, secondary and tertiary institutions have lost the motivation for teaching because of the insecurity, high cost of living and meager salaries they are paid. Most of them try to engage in private businesses to make ends meet. This has to a large extent, caused a deplorable decline in the equality of education and level of discipline among pupils and students. Corruption and poor governance has constituted immensely to the proliferation of small arm and light; weapon in the Niger Delta region. It is a common denominator that the federal government has abandoned the area that produces over 80% of her foreign exchange revenue, but what about the Agencies that the. Federal Government have created to look into the area, what about the state share of 13% oil revenue: derivation? To what extent has the Government of Niger Delta utilized these funds to develop her area? Our leaders to some extent have not done well; they have been involved in one financial scandal or the other. According to one

Niger Delta activist, "The federal Government should make the anti-corruption war more effective because, Nigerians were eager to see successful conviction and recovery of stolen public funds' from those who have abused their offices, particularly in the Niger Delta: (The Beacon August 29 September 4, 2008). In addition, the movement for the emancipation of Niger Delta (MEND) one of the major militant groups, disclosed that the group was considering attacks on the corrupt politicians in the Niger Delta to ensure that the people's commonwealth are not looted with reckless abandon by those: entrusted with it (The Guardian, October 9, 2008).

## **EFFECTS OF THE PROLIFERATION ON NATIONAL SECURITY**

Proliferation of small arms and light weapons has created a culture of violence within the Niger Delta region and an upsurge of criminal activities that is threatening the peace, security and economy of Nigeria.

### **National Security**

Proliferation of SALW in the Niger Delta region has far reaching implication for oil and gas development in Nigeria. Nigeria derives 90 percent of her foreign exchange earnings from sales of crude oil and gas (Guardian, June 29, 2008). It is recorded that between 2005 and 2006 short-in production as a result of violence in the Niger Delta was in the range of 500,000 to 700, 000 barrels per day as against Nigeria daily production capacity of 3.3 million barrels per day, and OPEC quota of 2.2 million barrels per day. This was; essentially due to crude pipeline vandalization and hostage taking by militant group in the Niger Delta. Since' Nigeria is very much dependent on oil and gas, and she disburses funds to federal, state and local government through her proceeds from oil and gas, whatever that impinges on her income must affect national security. Because the disbursement ability of the country will be reduced, this could affect/handicap her ability or challenge her function of protecting lives and properties and creating an enabling environment for societal development.

**Community Conflicts:** Proliferation and the use of SALW are instrumental to a lot of community crises. Addressing the press, the secretary to the Rivers State Government, Mr. Magus Ngei Abe said, insecurity in the Niger Delta over the past five years had caused great hardship and suffering in the area. He stressed that in Rivers, millions of

jobs, social life and infrastructures like schools and hospitals had become functional in several communities due to the activities of gun-toting criminals (The Guardian, October 2, 2008). If you visit most of the Niger Delta communities especially in Rivers State, Bayelsa and Delta states, you will notice that trivial matters result to the use of SALW in settling scores. There are some communities in which the inhabitants have deserted and become refugees within their neighborhood in Rivers State (Ogbakiri, Okrika, Tombia, Rumuekpe, Umu-Echem, Buguma, communities in Emuoha, etc.) The fear of ; the unknown violence, endear the civilian populace around these insecured areas to arm themselves for self-protection and possible deterrence. These legitimate firearms equally contribute to exacerbate crises within the area. Most of these illicit weapons are in the hands of civilians. Civilians should be discouraged from the use of fire arms, instead let the system strengthen her police security and create community Guards who will assist the police in surveillance, crime detection and prevention. Community Guards, will create an opportunity for the unemployed to be gainfully employed in community policing. The renounced militant will equally be involved in community Guard as a package for their rehabilitation and re-integration to the ° security. Some of the community Guards will man the security of our water ways, they shall serve as the intelligent unit of the naval forces at sea and same to the police force at land. These community Guards shall monitor and keep watch at the pipelines and other treasurable income generating facilities of the oil and gas companies both at land and at sea. They shall be trained and periodically re-trained to be patriotic and efficient in discharging their duties.

**Armed Robberies:** Within the Niger Delta areas armed robberies involving the use of SALW represent a major threat to life, properties and investment. The Nigeria police force have been arresting series of armed robbers whose age ranges from eighteen to twenty seven years. The proliferation of SAL W is facilitating armed robbery in the region.

**Hostage Taking:** Hostage taking has been an alarming phenomenon in the Niger Delta region. Most oil and gas company workers including construction workers both expatriate and local staffs have been victims' of hostage taking with ransom demanded and paid before their release. The security implication of this trend has created fears in the

operators of these multinational oil, gas and construction companies in Niger Delta. . Some companies have relocated, while some, e.g. Julius Berger have abandon their contact site at East West road, a road traversing about five Niger Delta States, to run for their dear life. Investigation by THE BEACON Newspaper revealed that over 40 companies have left Rivers State since the rise in violence began some three years ago. At the Onne oil and gas free zone, a source disclosed that all was not well as over 30 companies have so far left the zone with many others planning to relocate to a safer environment (The Beacon, August 15-21, 2008). The Hostage taking has been criminalized, their focus is not only on the expatriate and the oil workers but they are equally kidnapping Private individuals and demand for ransom so, the use and proliferation of SAL W is facilitating Hostage Taking. They use these small arms and light "weapons to intimidate a victim and scare spectators to achieve their mission. This portends a dangerous trend 'to our economic main stay as, expatriate are poised to desert the area. Authoritative source confirmed that the United Nation Diplomats and officials will not be deployed to the Niger Delta States, as it has been declared "by the UN as "a non-family duty station" (Guardian, October 7, 2008).

**Deter Economic Development:** The proliferation of small arms and light weapons is creating an upsurge of criminal activities that threaten our economic development. The Rivers State Governor Rt. Hon. Chibuike Amaechi told some congregation that "due to the activities of criminals masquerading as militants, .thousands of jobs have been lost by citizens in the state as companies are now pulling out of the state. This statement was corroborated by Todd Brown, a special Agent with the department of states Bureau of Diplomatic Security and Executive Director of Overseas Security Advising Council (OSAC), an arm of the United States Department of State. "These growing threats to western Business interests represent a serious threat to the local economies due to job loss, decrease in revenue and taxes" (Beacon, August 15-21, 2008). .The proliferation of small arms and light weapon has created a crime wave that has affected Nigeria national security hence, greater Chunk of the budget is allocated to security services at the National. state and local governments. This is likely to prevent the improvement of the economic and the welfare services of the population. Military spending can under develop the economies of developing countries, by diverting scarce financial resources

and trained personnel from projects that could create wealth and benefit the poor. The misuse of SALW creates security chaos that reduces economic activities due to early closure of business and entertainment outfits. It lowers their business patronage, impact on employment and cash flow. Beside, it equally discourages foreign investment and therefore damages the prospect of economic development. "The lingering Niger Delta crises in the oil rich Niger Delta region, if not abated may stall Russia gas giant Gazprom's intended multi-billion dollar investment venture in the country". (Guardian, October 8, 2008).

**Electoral and Political Violence:** The proliferation of SALW in the Niger Delta escalates the use of arms by idle youths who have turned themselves into political gangsters or thugs, to big time politicians. These unemployed youths are easily hired by politicians for both offensive and defensive purposes. They are there to intimidate political opponents, rig elections and protect themselves against attacks by their opponents. Numerous members of party stalwarts especially, the ruling Peoples Democratic Party have been linked to acts of violence or to armed groups.

## **THE WAY FORWARD**

### **Federal Government Initiatives**

The federal Government of Nigeria has a fire arms Act (1959) that regulates the production, use, import and' export of SAL W in Nigeria. An amendment of the 1959 Act was adopted, in 1966, which increased the; punishment for fire arms-related offences. In 1984, Robbery and Firearms Decree considerable expanded gun related offences and sanction under this decree, illegal possession of firearms attracts a fine of twenty' thousand Naira or a minimum of ten years imprisonment, while armed robberies are punishable by death; (hanging of firing squad). In 2001, the Economic "Community of West African States (ECOWAS): demonstrated another effort of curbing the illicit traffic in small arms and light weapons by declaring a' moratorium on small arms and encouraged the involvement of Organization and Association of Civil Society' in combating the illicit traffic in small arms. Nigeria is a champion of this moratorium of small arms in West' Africa. She observed that, "consideration is currently being given to achieving the ultimate objective of transforming the ECOWAS moratorium on

import/export of small arms from its current status of a political instrument to that of a legally binding convention", and asking for international support to achieve this goal! (Griffiths-Fulton, 2004). The federal Government of Nigeria inaugurated the National Committee on the ECOWAS moratorium in 2001. The committee is composed of representatives of the ministries of: Defense" Internal Affairs and Integration and Cooperation in Africa, National Orientation Agency, the Immigration Service, and various Security and Customs agencies such as the Police, the State Security Services and the National Drug Law Enforcement Agency. The mandate of the Committee is to:

- Control the import and manufacture of all SALW.
- Register and control the movement and use of legitimate arms stock.
- Detect and destroy all illicit and surplus weapons and
- Permit exemptions to the moratorium only in accordance with strict criteria.

The National Committee articulated its first work plan in 2003, which represents a viable basis on operations since inception can be based. However, the National committee is restricted in its performance as it does not have an operational budget. In 2003, the federal Government announced an "arm surrender" policy to recover weapons being used by ethnic militants in the Niger Delta. It recorded a modest success. However, no long, term strategy for recovering SALW has been put in place. On the civil society platform, a coalition of non-governmental organization in the Niger Delta launched a "Mop-up the arms" campaign in June 2003 (integrated Regional information Network, 13 October, 2003). The civil society reinforcement on the control of SALW in Nigeria is very appreciable. The civil society groups have been harnessed to collectively operate under the Nigeria Action Network on Small Arms (NANSA) which was launched on the 11<sup>th</sup> of November 2004. The National Network consists of 47 NGOS and works in close coordination with the Nigerian National Commission on small arms (International Alert, "Small Arms Control in Nigerians"). NANSA was part of a 12-man presidential committee that supervised the destruction of illegal arms retrieved from the warring faction in the Niger Delta. NANSA has made a significant impact on" coordinating the efforts of individual NGOS and bringing them together to work in sympathy rather than independently of the others. The network has also produced a two year action plan on SALW intended to assist and task the Government to strengthen their goal of eradication

or minimize gun culture in these environments. The inspector-General of police, Mr. Mike Okiro recently ordered the deployment of about 500 policemen to the nation's territorial boundaries to check the unlawful act of massive influx of illegal arms into the country (Punch, September 26; 2008).

### **The Use of Joint Task Force**

The Joint Task force (JTF) comprising integrated network of the Nigerian Army, Navy Air force and the Mobile Police put in place to arrest the upsurge of militants and crime in the Niger Delta area. The JTF has been patrolling land and waterways as a way to protect lives and properties. The JTF maintains regular marine patrol of identified notorious waterways, though; they have been exchanging fire with the militants while on patrol. The JTF are located at the headquarters of all the local government areas in the states especially, Rivers, Bayelsa and Delta states. They mount road blocks and patrol the town and villages. Actually, their presence though has been criticized but, is very instrumental to peace and security at the grass root level. The policy of the rural areas by JTF operatives reduces crime and checkmate movement of illicit weapons,

### **Ministry of Niger Delta**

The creation of Ministry of Niger Delta is a manifestation of international community's pressure on the federal government to expedite peace within the Niger Delta Region. Though the Yaradua's administration created a Niger Delta Peace and Conflict Resolution Committee, and equally inaugurated a Technical Committee on the Niger Delta, their task is to look into the cases at the region and recommend solution to arrest the crisis and upsurge of criminal activities. Reduction and eradication of the proliferation of small arms and light weapons can not only be achieved through legislation and moratorium but through achievable and sustainable plans of combating rural poverty and extending genuine democracy to the grass root. Government should, create deliberate policies of youth empowerment, competition and productivity in the region, and recreational centers for youth development. Criminality can be cured through government genuine plans to occupy the adventurous dispositions of youth; their energy should be positively directed. Government should carry out a deliberate policy to prevent

youth idleness because it breeds crime and antisocial behavior. The previous government of Obasanjo kept Niger Delta issues under the presidency; it lacked independent decision and creativity, even the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) suffered from government insincerity. NDDC allocation totaling more than N400 billion has not been released (Independent Monitor, September 22-24, 2008). This insincerity made the previous regime to fail in the Niger Delta hence, the upsurge of criminal activities and the upsurge of small arms and light weapons in the region. There is great fear on the sincerity of the federal Government to use the ministry of Niger Delta to establish the needed development and peace within the region. However, its creation foretells the seriousness of the Yaradua's administration to address the matter of Niger Delta. We hope that the ministry will not be crippled by bureaucratic red-tapism and conservativeness: It should be an action oriented ministry.

## **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION**

Proliferation of SAL W has caused untold hardship to the civilian populace, violated the rule of law, posed threat to the development of democracy within the Niger Delta region, impacted on the national economy, and diverted more national, state and local government budgets to security; promoted crime, community crises, youth restiveness, oil bunkery, hostage taking, political thuggery, arm robbery, etc. Proliferation of SAL W is instrumental to the escalation of the Niger Delta crises, attacks on oil facilities and her personnel especially the expatriates. The waterways of Nigeria and her borders are very porous; the naval force is ill equipped to combat marine related crime and smuggling of SAL W into the region. A harsh environment produces harsh mind and harsh way of doing things. The federal Government has not been sincere to the people of Niger Delta, and her policies towards the upliftment of the region hence, the region is volatile and awash with SAL W. To reduce the number of weapons in the Niger Delta, there is need to prevent the flow of weapons from other countries into illegal hands in Nigeria. Proliferation of arms is a global problem; it cannot be solved without international action. The United Nations must take a concrete stand on the illicit sale and proliferation of small arms and light weapons. There should be an international control on the sale and movement of arms, light weapons and related ammunitions. Government

should provide greater transparency around authorized small arms export. Authorized arms should be properly escorted to their destinations so that: they will not fall into wrong hands and black market. There should be Security Corporation among governments in the areas of policing and boarder control. Regional organizations should carry out concerted efforts to ensure the imposition of moratorium on the manufacture import and export of small arms and light weapons for ten years. The police, customs and Naval forces should be properly trained and equipped to curtail the inflow of these illicit arms into the Niger Delta. The government should run credible and sincere developmental programmes (both infrastructure and human resources) that will develop the area and empower the people. This will create employment and reduce youth restiveness. Civilian should not be allowed to own unlicensed guns. The federal government should involve the civil society group in her effort to curb the proliferation of SALW. It should engage the militant group and the respected leaders of the people of Niger Delta in productive and sincere dialogue, and to implement resolutions with military dispatch.

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