

The Bayelsa State Justice sector, The Royal Dutch Government & United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) holds the first Bayelsa State Justice Sector Town Hall Meeting on Wednesday, 23 March 2011, AT THE YENAGOA LOCAL GOVERNMENT HALL BAYELSA STATE

COMMUNIQUE

WHEREAS in 2009, Bayelsa State under a funding agreement with the Government of the Netherlands became a beneficiary under this Project funded by the Royal government of the Netherlands, on Strengthening Justice sector Integrity and Capacity facilitated by the UNODC and the NJI; and in December 2010, the Bayelsa State Judiciary, the UNODC and the NJI assembled stakeholders to forge a comprehensive and ambitious plan of action to improve access to justice, increase timeliness and quality of justice delivery, enhance the integrity, accountability and transparency of the Courts, and strengthen coordination and cooperation across the justice sector institutions in Bayelsa State;

AND WHEREAS a 2010-2013 Action Plan for strengthening justice sector integrity and capacity in Bayelsa State is being implemented by the Bayelsa state justice sector led by the judiciary.

AND WHEREAS as part of the activities in the Action Plan , Over 300 participants assembled at the first Bayelsa state justice sector town hall Meeting on 23 March 2011, including the Hon Chief Judge of Bayelsa State, the President of the Bayelsa State Customary Court of Appeal, Honorable Judges and Magistrates, Representative of the Attorney General & Commissioner for Justice, Chairmen of the state Customary Courts, The Bar, Royal Fathers, the Clergy, the Police, the Prisons, Civil Society Groups, the media, Officers of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and a cross section of the society. The Meeting was declared open by the Hon the Chief Judge of Bayelsa state, The Hon Justice Kate Abiri.

Participants OBSERVED:

1. That all institutions involved in the dispensation of justice experience various challenges including : Delays by ministry of justice to file cases, High cost of filing cases , High lawyers fees, judges residing and working outside their jurisdiction, corruption and high handedness of the police when dealing with the public, extra judicial killings, abuse of right to bail, access to courts in rural areas, lack of legal aid services for the indigent, abuse of office, involvement of police in civil debt recovery, lack of skills and knowledge of practice and procedures by police prosecutors and investigators, inability of citizens to assist accident victims due to fear of police brutality, inhuman treatment of awaiting trial prisoners especially when conveyed in unventilated "Black Maria ", Improper management of media relations, general integrity issues across the board and Lack of financial independence of the judiciary

IT WAS NOTED AS FOLLOWS:

1. The Legal Aid Council (LAC) provides pro-bono services to all citizens within available resources and their mandate , though they have only two lawyers {assisted by NYSC lawyers},and are restricted from dealing with cases of kidnapping, advance fee fraud and armed robbery.
2. The NBA provides pro-bono cases through their human rights committee and also receive referrals from the LAC
3. A citizens rights center at the ministry of justice provides pro bono services
4. That a committee has been set up by the Chief Judge to look in to the issue of high filling fees;
5. That court recording equipments would be provided in all court rooms by the end of the year;

6. That the new High court civil procedure rules provides for a restricted number of adjournments in cases;
7. That applications for transfer of cases would no longer be unduly entertained as this is used a ploy to delay cases;
8. The media are willing to partner with the justice sector in the effective delivery of justice
9. That positive changes have come in all sectors but the police will need to improve their relationship with the public;
10. There is a general lack of road net works that allow the police to combat crime

NOW THEREFORE, participants **RECOMMENDED** as follows:

1. There is a need to carry out statewide awareness campaign on citizen's rights and available pro bono services – LAC, FIDA and NBA;
2. The state and federal government should collaborate to complete the Bayelsa state prison with the barracks
3. The CJ to review the issues of High filing fees and delays caused by the existing system of assignment of cases
4. Juvenile courts and remand homes should be established;
5. Citizens should actively participate in issues of crime prevention and administration of justice;
6. Citizens should be willing to assist accident victims;
7. Citizens should at moments of distress use the help lines as provided by the state police command; 08036750758, 07034578208 and 07034282526
8. Prosecutors and IPOs should be provided with further trainings to enhance their capacity;
9. The police authorities should look into the reports of extortion of bribe from road transport users;
10. Cases of extra judicial killings should be formally reported to the appropriate authorities for necessary action;
11. Fundamental Human rights violations should be reported, investigated and addressed
12. Brass and Nembe and other divisions outside Yenagoa should be provided with the conducive environment ,security and transportation to enable judges sit in their jurisdiction
13. Ministry of Justice should establish offices of the DPP in all judicial divisions and post lawyers.
14. The relationship between the police and the judiciary and other justice sector institutions should be improved and all justice sector institutions should cooperate for a more efficient and effective justice system
15. Issues related to the welfare of women and children should be given the required attention in courts
16. The police should endeavor to be REAL friends of the public
17. Town hall meetings should be organized specifically to address issues affecting the police.
18. The police should be provided with patrol vehicles and the enabling environment to function effectively.
19. The implementation of the constitutional provision for judicial independence is KEY to ensuring the enabling environment for the judiciary to be reformed effectively.

Express appreciation to the Bayelsa State Judiciary for hosting and coordinating the Town Hall Meeting and to our Partners – The Royal Dutch Government and UNODC – for their financial and other support.

Yenagoa, 23 March 2011