



# Niger Delta Dialogue

*A World of Peace*

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Academic Associates PeaceWorks



# Niger Delta Dialogue

**13<sup>th</sup> Niger Delta Dialogue:**  
**Building Trust and Recovering Spaces**  
**for Nonviolent Elections in Bayelsa State.**

**July 9 -10, 2019**

**Lady Diama Memorial Event Place, Yenagoa**



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## Introduction



### Cross Section of Participants at the 13th NDD

The 13<sup>th</sup> Session of the most sustained and far-reaching peace and development discourse platform, the Niger Delta Dialogue (NDD) held at the lady Daima Memorial Event Place, 30 Osiri Road, Yenagoa, Bayelsa State on the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> of July 2019. With the theme “Building Trust and Recovering Spaces for Nonviolent Elections in Bayelsa State”. The main thrust of the two day event was to seek ways of reducing electoral violence in Bayelsa State come November. In attendance at the meeting were members of the Niger Delta Dialogue, PANDEF, traditional rulers, civil society actors, governorship aspirants, security agencies, religious leaders, leaders of political parties, INEC, women groups, youth groups, the Goodluck Jonathan Foundation and the international community.

The dialogue commenced in the afternoon of 9<sup>th</sup> July with Dr Judith Burdin Asuni, one of the facilitators of the NDD, who is also the Executive

Director of Academic Associates PeaceWorks, welcoming the participants to the 13<sup>th</sup> Session of the Niger Delta Dialogue. The NDD which is being funded by the European Union, started three years ago (June 2016) at the heels of violent attacks on oil facilities by the Niger Delta Avengers. A critical achievement of the NDD was a period of ceasefire and had since then become a non-adversarial space for stakeholders of the Niger Delta region to highlight critical issues of development, security, among others and prefer solution. So far, twelve (12) dialogues have been held looking at a number of issues affecting the peace of the region and solutions preferred.

## Opening Remarks



### Chief Dr. Judith Burdin Asuni

Executive Director, Academic Associates PeaceWorks

In her opening remarks, the chief convener and head of the secretariat of the Niger Delta Dialogue, who is also the Executive Director of Academic Associates PeaceWorks (AAPW), **Chief Dr. Judith Burdin Asuni** appreciated the participants for attending the 13<sup>th</sup> session of the Niger Delta Dialogue.

She stated that the NDD which started three years ago, precisely June of 2016, at the time the Niger Delta Avengers were attacking oil facilities across the region. The activities of the group resulted a downturn in oil production, a situation which brought about a decline in the nation's economic activities and yet nobody was engaging with the people of the region. It was at the heel of the violent agitations that stakeholders from the region were invited for the first dialogue meeting in June, 2016 with a view to understand what the issues were in order to prefer the right solutions. After the first meeting which was thought will be a onetime occasion, the NDD has held twelve meetings looking at issues of concern in the region. The NDD has continued to engage people of the region, government agents and civil society groups in trying to resolve the issues to sustain the peace.

In clearly defining the purpose of the two day event, Dr Judy called on the leaders of the Odenwari women, the Gallant 5 and the Okrika women explain why they were invited to participate in the 13<sup>th</sup> dialogue. Responding, the women stated that their efforts in protecting the electoral process from being hijacked by the military in their local government areas in rivers state during the 2019 general elections, is worth sharing and can be replicated in Bayelsa particularly as the state prepares for election in November.

Dr Judith explained that the 13<sup>th</sup> dialogue is a veritable platform for stakeholders to brainstorm on seeking new approaches to stopping election violence come November. She further stated that

the people of Bayelsa can explore nonviolent ways of curbing election violence through shared experiences from elsewhere i.e Okrika and Ogu/Bolo, adding that the women strategically kept their sons, husbands, brothers and fathers from violence, while resisting the military non-violently.

She thanked the European Union which has continued to support the NDD in the last three years. She also commended the likes of HH Anabs Sara Igbe, Amb Nkoyo Toyo, Elder TK Ogoriba, Amb Godknows Igali and many others for being supportive and having faith in the dialogue process. She also thanked other international partners of the NDD who, for one reason or the other, could not make it to the meeting.

She concluded by wishing the participants fruitful deliberations, while calling on all stakeholders to make effort towards free, fair and credible elections void of violence.



### HRM Obi Martha Dunkwu Omu of Anioma Nation

#### Remarks by HRM Obi Martha Dunkwu

In her opening remark, the traditional ruler said it is good for men to understand their traditional roles of leadership in the home but not forgetting the roles of women in collaboration for true leadership. She said women should also not disregard the role of the man whether in the home or any leadership position in their quest for relevance.

The Queen Mother stated that no nation survives in isolation of women, adding that God created the woman to add value to man's effort. Speakin further, she urged citizens to stop the blame game, saying that leadership and followership have corresponding responsibilities. As much as the onus is on the leaders for optimum performance, a lot is also expected from followers. She mentioned that when leaders are appointed, they should be allowed to work without disruptions so they can make a mark within their sphere of operations.

## Goodwill Message from Her Excellency, Dame Patience Faka Jonathan



**Mrs. Comfort Adigha,**  
Rep. of Dame Patience Jonathan

The wife of the former president, Dame Patience Jonathan, was duly represented by **Mrs. Comfort Adigha**, one of her aids and below is her speech:

### Protocol

I am delighted to be at this significant Dialogue session with major stakeholders as the 2019 Governorship election comes up in a few months. Let me commend the AAPeaceWorks, its Niger Delta Dialogue Secretariat, the European Union, the Goodluck Jonathan Foundation and their entire team for facilitating this programme, particularly with the theme, “building trust and recovering spaces for non-violent elections in Bayelsa State”.

Electoral violence is a major threat to our democracy. We witnessed a lot of violence during the general elections conducted a few months ago, particularly in the Niger Delta region. It is a fact that violence before, during and after any election is a political liability that negatively affects the political aspirations of a lot of men and women. Most people are intimidated and are forced to support other candidates rather than come out to participate and freely exercise their franchise during elections.

For any society to develop, there must be peace and stability and for our democracy to thrive, the electoral process should always conclude with peaceful elections and transitions. To achieve

non-violent electoral process and national prosperity, institutions must be democratic and have representatives from all groups in the society.

At the political party level, for elections to be truly free and fair, aspirants must have the same level playing field to participate. Their primaries should be conducted in a transparent method to build trust in the people that will vote during the main elections. Also, aspirants should be allowed to freely engage the citizens on an equal basis without fear of intimidation and harassment.

The atmosphere during elections must be peaceful and suitable for men and women, old and young, to go out and vote for their preferred candidates as a peaceful environment will ensure that the elections are free of manipulations, thuggery and violence. The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) should continue to sensitize the masses on

the need for peaceful elections in order to build trust and increase citizen participation. If the people trust the process that brings a candidate, they will come out en masse to vote; if not they will be reluctant to come out and vote.

In Bayelsa State, the leaders, regardless of political affiliations should ensure that the selection processes of candidates are done in a peaceful and transparent manner to discourage all forms of violence. Our political space should not be for those who will cause disorder and ruin the process of elections whenever they want. Instead it should be for all who believe in peace and have the mandate of the people to govern them. At the end of the elections, all Bayelsans should support the winner of the election regardless of their political leanings for peace to reign in our State.

Finally, women as key stakeholders of peace building activities should interface with their partners, children and wards against participating in electoral fraud and violence. Let us continue to work for the peace, unity and development of Bayelsa State and our country, Nigeria.

Once again, I thank the Niger Delta Dialogue Secretariat, the European Union and collaborating organizations for coming up with a programme of this nature that will set the pace for non-violent and credible election in Bayelsa State.

## Nonviolence Experiences from Elsewhere and Recommendations



**Christiana Tamunobereton-ari, Dorcas Asiberegbanika, Rachael Walter, Tammy Ibibofofi with Blessing Darefaka (Gallant 5 of Ogu/Bolo)**

**Barrister Christiana Tamunobereton-ari** of the Gallant 5 of Ogu/Bolo L.G, Rivers State. Christy described the action taken by the women of Ogu/Bolo during the gubernatorial election in March 2019. She said that the motivation of the Gallant Five in the Ogu/Bolo incidence was that they realized the fact that they were all stakeholders in the Nigerian electoral process. She continued that they had structures by way of women engagement at various levels of leadership. The G5 group is responsible for coordinating other groups of women and girls, old and young before, during and after the elections. She said that the whole incidences that transpired in Ogu/Bolo during the elections were not planned but emanated when they advised themselves that after voting, they should remain until the votes were counted. According to her, all that the women did was to ensure that the peace they had always enjoyed in their communities remained. She told listeners that it was a woman who led the armies to hijack electoral materials but they stood their grounds to vehemently resist them non-violently, employing all the “woman power” at their disposal. She said that in a bid to protect their votes, they went with four (4) vehicles to escort the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) officials to the RAC centres. According to her, they had same issues with the army during the presidential election which they couldn't properly handle but took a cue from the mistakes of the first election to avert a repeat.

Barr. Christy further explained that two days to the governorship election, armed soldiers invaded Ogu to beat-up and arrest male youths. Upon noticing that they were ready to beat up and shoot the male youths, the women took it upon themselves to defend their territory. They all went to the Joint Task Force (JTF) quarters to report to their leadership what the military men had done. According to her, they resorted to prayers that God should help them and she said God helped them. About 200 of their women marched to INEC office from Thursday to Friday. While keeping vigil at the INEC office, they noticed some thugs breaking into the office to cart away electoral materials but they met the women's resistance. According to her, they were in that state of mind and body without bathing, sleeping, resting or proper meal. They waited till Saturday and ensured that they voted and protected their votes. She said they got documentary evidence of the election from their members at each unit and ensured that the materials were not hijacked.

Despite their efforts, the Army personnel eventually hijacked materials of wards 7, 8, 9 and 10. She agreed that though they got discouraged at that point but eventually sprung up with the hope to protect the rest of the eight wards. What further encouraged them was that some army personnel who were not totally in support of the military invasion, secretly encouraged them not to give up but fight back. When it was obvious that they were going to lose the materials to the army, they decided to go naked and that made the army to retreat. In a desperate measure to assert the “woman power” in her, she took off her heavily soaked menstruation pad and squeezed the blood all over the army vehicle and the ignition couldn't start. The army pleaded with the women to undo whatever they had done to their vehicle. She poured a bottle of dry gin on the vehicle, and prayed; it then started and the army drove away. That was how they had victory from the army. This incidence happened on Sunday. They took these desperate measures because they had seen violence in their communities before and wouldn't want a repeat, she concluded.

The remaining four members of the group also shared their experiences and sang songs of solidarity.

### Okrika Women

**Ibiwari Iyama**, who spoke on behalf of the Women of Okrika Local Government Area of Rivers State, said the women took the initiative to protect their electoral process. She expressed gladness to be a part of the platform that showcases the strength of women in building peace and security in Rivers State and the Niger

Delta. She opined that if people needed to see a change in their community, they should be part of the process. She told the story of how they started the process of securing their votes during the elections by campaigning for people to get their voters cards, assuring the people of Okrika that



**Ibiwari Iyama, Coordinator of Female Youths, Okrika L.G.A**

their votes will count. According to her, they adopted an approach whereby they stationed at least one female youth at each pooling unit to monitor the electoral process. In their bid to secure their votes while ensuring a peaceful voting atmosphere, they moved from ward to ward and also to the Local Government Area (LGA) council, only to find out to their chagrin that the Nigerian Army were shooting sporadically to scare away the men. She continued that the men stayed away to avoid being casualties but the women waited till 11pm.

She told the participants that when they perceived that danger was imminent from the army, they went to the King of Ogoloma and other kings, stating that all they needed was peace during that election, because the reprisal attack from their men could be disastrous. A member of the king's council addressed them to go home, that peace would reign. On their way to the king of Okochiri, King Michael Ateke Tom, they found out that soldiers had invaded his palace. "We decided that we would take charge during the governorship." She chipped in that their experiences during the presidential and national houses of assembly elections were lessons for women everywhere for them to come out strong and ensured there will be no repeat of same during the governorship election in Bayelsa State.

## Ondewari Women of Southern Ijaw

**Philomina Kinere Lafieghe** narrated her story thus: "Sometime in 2017, there was a crisis in Ondewari community where two groups of cult boys came against each other due to oil and gas related issues. For example two brothers from same family could be in opposition groups with very deadly intentions, fighting and killing each other. This continued until four (4) of the brothers were killed and the fifth one was about to die from bullet wounds in the leg to the extent of the leg being amputated".

The men and elders of the community tried severally to resolve the issue to no avail; even the government tried also but without success.

"The whole challenge got me worried because this was my community at the brink of total collapse and destruction. I couldn't watch my younger ones kill themselves and destroy the community,



**Philomina Kinere**

something needed to be done", she said.

According to her, she galvanized four (4) other women to start a reconciliatory movement to end the communal war; just like the Gallant 5 of Ogu/Bolo. There was hatred and bitterness spreading like venom in the community, because there must be someone from a family who had been killed by another and they were all ready and willing to retaliate; hence it was difficult getting people to agree to be part of the peace process.

According to Philomina, the motivation she had was that if nothing is done, one day she will be the soft target who will be killed because somehow everybody is related to one or more of the families. At that point, she decided to do what she could with the other ladies because it was futile waiting on government or any company for intervention.

In her words, "We organized ourselves and started working with the boys. Phone calls, physical visits, advocacies and meetings were some of the measures we started with. We didn't allow them space or gap, even without funding or support. We

tasked ourselves to ensure that little funds were available for logistics. We needed to build trust and confidence with them and continuity and transparency was the key, hence we didn't allow them space for any more violence”.

The pathetic thing is that these boys were between 13 – 15 years, who were supposed to be under the tutelage and care of their parents. “Wherever I am called to give talks, I advise parents to be responsible for their children, by giving birth to only the ones they can take care of”. She continued that when parents are not able to take care of their children, they go into the streets to fend for themselves and learn how to engage in all kinds of vices.

She cautioned that mothers have more roles to play more than the fathers because the children spend more time with them than the fathers and those moments are time to mould and build the characters of these children. Our intervention extended to inviting mothers of the children to the villages, sometimes to the city, sometimes inviting them to the Bayelsa State government house to be part of the thanksgiving activities with her Excellency, the wife of the governor. They bought gifts of wrappers, uniforms and some sorts of exposure just to enlighten them of their good intentions for their children and themselves. In their approaches, they also engaged the children, even younger ones to say what their challenges were. They encouraged the children to proffer solutions to the issues at hand and amazing results were achieved. “We interfaced with the fathers, elders and chiefs separately to understand their views of the conflict. Everyone was satisfied that we meant well for the entire community.”

“We separately visited the warring boys to really have a grasp of what their issues were”. Out of the two (2) factions, one was permanently in the village and couldn't go to the city, while those in the city were situated there and couldn't visit the village for fear of being killed – it was terrible! At the point, the army started going to the village for the boys and their parents got annoyed with us for inviting the army to kill their children and sack the village. We had to pay a courtesy visit to the army, telling them of the extent of our work. They were surprised that there was work already on-going which they never knew about. They promised to “hands off” the community and they kept to their words, she added.

“Finally, we succeeded in bringing the two groups together on a particular day for peace to reign. Prior to this “Day of Reconciliation”, some politicians had already started to engage these boys in their usual manner. They had started buying arms for them, giving them money and because of

the level of trust we had built over time, whatever thing they did with those politicians they will tell us. We worked with them until finally they agreed not to kill each other again but rather work together to help build the community. The reconciliation continued until even the boy whose leg was amputated was begged and apologized to, leading to hugs, mixed emotional tears of regrets, genuine reconciliation, relief and joy on that day. “That she said, is the “power of a woman”, stating that what the government could not do, the women achieved without money.

“To further prove how desperate these politicians were, a night to the elections, a politician came into the community to cause commotion by bringing bags/sacks full of money into the community just to lure the boys back into electoral violence. When we saw the desperation of the political class, we had to engage in fasting and prayers to God to intervene. Eventually God helped us, because they took the money but didn't fight each other and didn't vote for that politician.”

### Messages of Commitment and Solidarity European Union



Osaro Odemwinge of the EU

‘I, **Osaro Odemwinge** of the EU bring you greetings from the EU Delegation and specially from Ambassador Ketil Karlsen, Head of Delegation, who though not physically present, is here in spirit’. Mr Osaro stated that the EU is glad to be associated with Academic Associates PeaceWorks, which serves as the secretariat of the Niger Delta Dialogue. He reaffirmed the EU's determination to stand shoulder to shoulder with Nigeria in ensuring that democracy thrives to the benefit of all person. He explained that since 1999, the EU has invested over Euro 100 million to support key institutions and sectors to improve the country's electoral system.

He further stated that the EU has remain committed in supporting the electoral process as evidenced in the large contingent it deployed to observe the 2019 general elections, adding that the recommendations that came out of the election observation process had been handed to the Nigerian Authorities. He expressed hope that citizens will work with the relevant government institutions to ensure the consideration and adoption of the recommendation ahead of the 2023 general elections.

For the upcoming Bayelsa and Kogi elections, we note the commitment of INEC as disclosed by its

leadership to set new records in conducting transparent elections. The EU calls on stakeholders to support INEC to achieve its commitment by being unyielding to any form of inducement to cause violence. He said no matter how citizens feel about the process and outcome of the elections, the law court remains the most appropriate mechanism to express disagreement. He informed the participants that the EU plans to work with and mobilize other missions in Nigeria to deploy observers to the Bayelsa and Kogi elections.

On behalf of the EU Delegation in Nigeria, Mr. Osaro wished the participants fruitful deliberations.

## PANDEF



**High Chief Anabs Sara-Igbe**

**High Chief Sara-Igbe Anabs** represented the pan regional group, PANDEF. He opined that violence in election periods usually begin with the way primaries are conducted, which in most cases snowballs into desperation on the part of candidates as they do not want the huge amount spent on nomination form to be a waste. He describes such desperation as a source of electoral violence. He further stated that security agencies sometimes contribute to violence by their actions

and inactions, adding that they should not condescend to being used by anyone to disrupt the smooth conduct of the elections. The security agencies were told to be transparent, free and fair. INEC was not left out in the call for transparency and fairness as there had been situations where it contributes to electoral violence by allowing one party to have control over the other. The way materials are distributed is also worrisome as the materials are sometimes handed over to political parties to influence outcome.

Youths and their involvement in cult related activities is considered lucrative as they are often brainwashed by aspirants that they will get political appointments upon their victory. Politics should not be seen as a “do or die affair” but a privilege to serve the people.

He concluded by thanking the NDD for being the “think tank” of PANDEF. He urged politicians to utilize every opportunity to impact positively on their people, while also calling on the people of the region to join hands in changing the narrative.

## INEC



**Dr. (Mrs.) Blessing Anyalebechi**

**Dr. (Mrs.) Blessing Anyalebechi** who represented Mrs May Agbamuche Mbu, the INEC National Commissioner, (who also doubles as the chairperson, Legal Services of the Commission), noted that Mrs May A. Mbu, is happy with the effort of the NDD in reducing violence in the region, particularly election violence. She stated that the National Commissioner and the Resident Electoral Commissioner could not attend the meeting as they were engaged in a programme in Lagos. Speaking on behalf of the Commissioner, Mrs Anyalebechi noted that there is no gainsaying the fact that the Commission's successful outings during elections is predicated upon peaceful atmosphere, adding that the place of peace during and after elections cannot be over emphasized. She said the Commission declares poll and not wars, adding that the institution had called on all political parties to conduct their primaries peacefully and according to extant laws. She further emphasized that INEC subscribes to violence free elections and demonstrate its dislike for violence by cancelling results in places where

elections were disrupted. Therefore, the struggle to change the narrative that Bayelsa elections are characterised by violence and bloodshed should be the collaborative effort of stakeholders and all lovers of peace.

Dr. Blessing Anyalebechi further posited that the November 16<sup>th</sup> election is a stand-alone election, stating that all eyes and ears will be focused on Kogi and Bayelsa states. She said the Commission appreciates the work of AA PeaceWorks, especially having collaborated with them in previous elections, while informing participants that the Resident Electoral Commissioner organised meetings between Nembe and Basanbri to preach peace in the last election. The process she said, paid off, as it helped to change the narrative. She further stated that there is need to keep the communication alive, and stressed the need for continued interaction among stakeholders to reduce the tension.

She urged participants at the 13<sup>th</sup> NDD and all stakeholders to brainstorm and come up with ways to change the narrative, while wishing them robust deliberations.

## Military



**Major E. A Yahaya**

The 16 Brigade Nigerian Army was represented by **Major E. A Yahaya** who stated that the Army remains apolitical in the discharge of its mandate and will work in accordance with the laws of the country as enshrined in the constitution. However, he urged political parties and aspirants to warn their supporters to shun violence before, during and after the elections. He noted that often times, candidates commit to peace during public gatherings but such commitments are never adhered to in most cases. He urged stakeholders to be law abiding always, while wishing the participants fruitful discussions.

## The Nigerian Navy



**Sub. Lt. M. I. Igbe.**

The Nigerian Navy was represented by **Sub Lt. M. I Igbe**. He commended the Niger Delta Dialogue for its relentless effort in expanding the dialogue space for stakeholder's engagement. He said in line with the constitution of the federal republic of Nigeria, the Navy is charged with the responsibility of securing the waterways. He reaffirmed the navy's commitment in supporting the peaceful conduct of elections by ensuring that the waterways are safe and secured for the passage and ferrying of man and electoral materials before, during and after the elections. He thanked the organisers of the event for recognising the Navy as a critical stakeholder as Bayelsa goes to the polls, adding that the Navy appreciates the invitation extended to it.

## Other Contributors

**Dr. Felix Tuodolor**, First Ijaw Youth Council President, reminded those present that “erosion of citizen power is a major undoing of free, fair and credible election”. He told participants that security agencies have roles to play by way of protection of citizens in order for them to freely exercise their franchise.

Others who added their voices to the process of peace building during the elections included the **Amayanowei of Tungbo, Amos Pobinafa; Yahaya Togo**, the president general, Council for Islamic affairs, Bayelsa state; **Alabo Nengi James**, spokesperson of Nembe Council of Chiefs, representing rural chiefs. They all towed the paths of peace.

## Presentations

### Factors that may Precipitate Violence in the November Election- Dr Isaac Adi

Dr. Adi identified the following triggers of electoral violence:

- The use of security forces for the purpose of intimidation by politicians
- Godfatherism
- Absence of the rule of law
- Presence of small and light arms
- Insensitive media reporting
- Imposition of candidates

He called for the collective collaboration of stakeholders in ensuring that the elections are void



**Dr Isaac Adi**

of violence. He stated that issues of injustice

should also be addressed, while also calling for transparency and credibility even from the conduct of the primaries.

### Comments

During the comment session, many of the participants corroborated the triggers responsible for the rising political and social violence in Bayelsa as earlier identified by Dr Adi. However, participants decried the high level of proliferation of cult groups and their activities, so much so that some places within Yenagoa metropolis are now 'no go areas' largely dominated by factions of cult groups.

Chief Alabo Nengi James said gratification of violence is considered a menace which has impacted negatively on the socio-political terrain of Bayelsa state. Those who are perpetrators of violence of all forms are being rewarded with cash and gift items, including those who kill and

destroy. Political actors and sponsors of violence should be watched and if found guilty, be prosecuted accordingly. Another very crucial area which should be looked into is the massive construction and proliferation of arms and ammunitions, which according to the participants, is alarming in Bayelsa.

Again, the 'must win' attitude of some politicians, fuelled by desperation, contributes to election violence as their supporters also exhibits such desperation through intimidation of opponents, destruction of campaign material which results in violence involving supporters in most cases and snatching of ballot boxes. Another factor highlighted is insecurity, because ammunitions are in the hands of the wrong people. Voter education was also emphasized.

The involvement of traditional rulers in politics breeds violence in the communities. Some of them sometimes take money from politicians and end up imposing such candidates on the people thereby infringing on the right of citizens to vote for candidates of their choice. Participants also warned those who deceive the electorates with the mantra of "core Ijaw" to desist from it to avoid creating enmities among brothers.

Lastly, the role of the military as seen in some states during the 2019 general elections is worrisome. Therefore, preventive measures should be put in place to put the activities of the military under check. For INEC, there should be no excuse for not conducting credible elections as Bayelsa has just 8 local government.

### Scenarios of the Different Local Government Areas:

Participants were asked to raise prevalent issues peculiar to their local government areas that may mar the smooth conduct of the November election. The following social menaces cut across all the LGAs and can negatively impact the election if nothing is done to address them:

- Cultism
- Vote buying      Interception of voters
- Militancy
- Drug and substance abuse
- Procurement of Mercenaries (boys are bought over to carry out violence)
- Godfatherism and favouritism
- Decimated traditional institutions
- Territorial dominance between the two divides
- Influential oil contractors
- Factional security operatives

## Where are we as a region?

**Ambassador Nkoyo Toyo** gave a rundown of the inherent challenges of the region and how the NDD in collaboration with PANDEF and other organizations waded in to resolve conflict issues that ordinarily would have resulted in monumental national disaster. She mentioned that members of the NDD were selected from different ethnic groups from the region. According to her, “consultations from other major stakeholders, suggests that it was imperative for the NDD to function in order to cater for issues of violence in the region”.

The cardinal point of campaign for peaceful election by NDD is premised upon the principles of the former president Goodluck Ebele Jonathan; that no one's blood is worth the election or political ambition of any Nigerian (or Bayelsan). She further stated that the region was a little bit wounded as a result of happenings during the 2019 general elections, while saying it is needless to go round another circle of violence when lessons can be learned from previous experiences to change the narrative. Part of the several efforts of the NDD to sustain peace in the region, was the facilitation of a regional meeting with all the ethnic youth nationalities across the region and other critical stakeholders in attendance. The aim of that meeting which held in November 2018 in Warri, was to disabuse the mind of youths on election violence channel their energies towards peace building. Part of the resolution in that meeting was to take the message of nonviolence to their various states to keep the youths from violence. Premised on the decision to further engage the youths in the individual states, the leadership of the various ethnic nationalities called for partnership with the NDD to conduct technical sessions to seek ways of changing the narrative. The technical sessions held in Delta, Rivers and Akwa Ibom states. The efforts made towards stopping election violence yielded positively as violence was reduced to its barest minimum compared to previous elections. However, Rivers state experienced some level of violence due to the militarization of the electoral space.

Ambassador Nkoyo emphasized that the police, INEC, Civil Society, National Peace Committee, PANDEF, the Goodluck Jonathan Foundation and other regional bodies gave support of the 13<sup>th</sup> edition of the Niger Delta Dialogue, an indication that the region does not want a repeat of violence during election. So the change in the narrative should be evident in the Bayelsa election come November. She called on participants to wholeheartedly highlight triggers of election violence as seen in the state, while saying that whatever resolutions reached on stopping electoral violence should capture stakeholder's participation as no one can better change the narrative than the stakeholders.

## Building Trust and Recovering Spaces for Nonviolent Elections- Ambassador Nkoyo Toyo



### Ambassador Nkoyo Toyo

- In addition to the points raised earlier, actions the national authorities should take to redouble efforts to prevent violence in hotspot zones as prioritized include: Policies tailored to each state; Improving security arrangements by identifying and sanctioning politicians and groups using inflammatory rhetoric;
- Inciting violence or plotting to perpetuate it (i.e. ensuring order at campaigns and rallies); Strengthening inter-agency cooperation to protect polling centres in a non-partisan and non-threatening manner;
- Encouraging leading politicians at the state and local levels to honour commitments already made at the national level, to campaign and pursue any grievances peacefully and lawfully (ideally, the main rivals in conflict-prone states would make joint pledges in public ceremonies);
- Holding confidence-building dialogues between the local leaders of ethnic, religious and farmer-herder communities that are locked in conflict, as a way to undercut efforts by politicians to stoke divides for their own ends.

### Crisis states -Can Bayelsa be different?

Using the Bayelsa and Kogi gubernatorial elections coming up November 2019 as a base for comparison of what has happened and what ought to be expected. Ambassador Nkoyo referenced a report recently published by the European Union (EU) on the 2019 general elections observed in 223 polling units and 81 collation centres across Nigeria, the report reads in part.

- “In almost all, the results forms and smart card readers were not packaged in a tamper-evident envelopes as required”.
- “Numerical discrepancies and anomalies on polling unit results forms were identified and were mostly corrected by collation officers on the spot, but without a clear system of record-keeping.”
- It added, “Leading parties were at fault in not reining in acts of violence and intimidation by their supporters, and abuse of incumbency at federal and state levels.”
- “Inconsistent numbers during collation, “lack of clear checks and explanations, and insufficient public information undermined the integrity of the elections.

## INEC’S Response to EU and Commitment to Act

- She also highlighted the opinion and responses said by the INEC Chairman, Prof. Mahmood Yakubu when he was being given the report in Abuja, he said “Every election in any democracy around the world is work in progress. We therefore look forward to the full EU EOM report and recommendations on the elections.
- “We are confident that there will be useful lessons for the commission as we prepare for future elections.
- “Indeed, the report is coming at the right time as it will feed into our ongoing review of the conduct of the elections.
- “Let me assure you that the commission will again quickly focus attention on the electoral legal framework in addition to several other areas of reform.
- “We will study in detail all your recommendations as part of our ongoing internal review of the 2019 general elections which we hope to conclude in the next two months,” he added.
- Prof Mahmood INEC Chairman receiving the report of the EU Observer Mission  
Not Waiting for INEC, Others to Act to Recover Spaces
- THE role of some elders in dousing the tension that preceded and followed the 2015 presidential election is one that has remained remarkable till date. Their intervention climaxed as the results of the 2015 presidential elections showed the incumbent President Goodluck Jonathan losing to his challenger, Muhammadu Buhari.
- The men, alongside a few others, worked to mellow the tension that had gripped the polity. Interestingly, it was the formation of the National Peace Committee that provided the platform upon which the statesmanship role was played.  
But before the Peace Committee, it was Professor Bolaji Akinyemi, former External

Affairs Minister, who first wrote an open letter to both Jonathan and Buhari admonishing both men to be held down by an agreement to call their supporters to order and tone down the rhetoric of violence that rented the air at that time. Read more at: <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2016/10/reminiscing-role-trouble-shooters/>

Looking at the progression of result achieved by these few gentlemen and elders who reduced the tension that came out of the 2015 presidential election, attention therefore needs to be focused on areas where political interest are concerted in order to be checkmated and act upon to prevent violence elections in Bayelsa:

- Cultism
- Drugs
- Impunity
- Incumbency
- Political parties
- Godfathers
- Rewards from violence
- Geography of LGA
- Differences within each LGA
- Imposition
- Election without campaign
- Abuja vs yenagoa
- Irresponsible media
- Money and greed
- Ignorance
- Collapse of coherence in community
- Arms and the violence enterpreneurs
- Unemployed youth
- Influx of youth from other states
- Security contractors
- Zoning and rotation
- INEC
- Police
- Federal intervention
- INEC working with police
- The aspirants
- The candidates
- Traditional rulers
- Vote buying
- Bunkering

A case study that can be adapted into the framework of Bayelsa state election.

Faced with rising tensions across Nigeria, Sen Obi had written a letter to the leadership of the then opposition party concerning the All Political Parties Stakeholders Summit, which they adopted at their NEC meeting, and unanimously approved. At the forum which was key to the formation of the peace committee, stakeholders engaged in critical

discussion on how to achieve and ensure a violent free election, run an issue driven campaign devoid of hate speech and on how to reduce the tensed political atmosphere.

Read more at:

<https://www.vanguardngr.com/2016/10/reminisci-ng-role-trouble-shooters/>

## The main Approaches to Peaceful Gains

- What do we do as individuals?
- What do we do through our communities and constituencies?
- What can the aspirants and candidates do?

Example 1 Approach: Consultations and dialogue  
The forum had the notable presence of the following: then President Goodluck Jonathan GCFR, candidate of the All Progressives Congress APC, Muhammadu Buhari, former head of State Gen. Abdulsalami Abubakar, former Vice President, Dr. Alex Ekwueme, former Chief of General Staff (Vice President) Commodore Ebitu Ukiwe and then chairman of INEC Prof. Attahiru Jega and chairmen of political parties among others.

Example 2 Approach: Alliance building and the G5 formula

- Can we recreate the model of the women and those of communities that we have heard about from our meeting yesterday?
- What of the traditional leaders?
- What of the religious leaders?
- What of the trade unions and cultural association?

Example 3 Approach: The Peace Accord

The Abuja Accord was another concept aimed at preventing pre and post-election violence. It resulted in the signing of a peace agreement by participating presidential candidates and chairmen of political parties. The success of the initiative was such that the UN Secretary General, Mr. Banki Moon, sent a high powered delegation led by the UN representative in Africa, Mr. IBN Chambas, to the office of Sen Obi with a note of appreciation for convening such a landmark event that brought peace to the largest country in Africa contrary to the predictions of possible chaos. Instructively, the facilitators at the signing of the accord at the instance of the organizers were men of proven professional and moral integrity. The presence.

## The Ijaw National Congress Elections of June 2019 – A foretaste or an aftermath????

Has Bayelsa as Ijaw heartland failed Izons or are Ijaws waiting from bayelsa?

What are the linkages with the November elections and where do we go from last month -beyond lamentations?

Where is the spirit of community and who is ready to lead it on the side of those invested in this process?

Should we not start with a post portem and should we not get leaders from outside Bayelsa to reflect on these developments and tie the contestant down to some deliverables

Should any election be won on the blood of an Ijaw son or daughter?

## A Short Term Agenda – that Starts Now

- The Niger Delta dialogue shall commit
- To work with any group to provide some traction on smart (specific, measureable, achievable, realistic and timebound) proposals emerging from the syndicate groups
- To assist the women in bayelsa state to understand how they can set up their ward action against violence in elections
- To support the media to counter fake and violence media
- To bring the national peace committee, INEC and police to the discussion table here in Bayelsa via bishop kukah and jonathan foundation
- All of the above is subject to local leadership and direction

## Statement of Charge to Bayelsa State by the Special Guest of Honour, HE Former President Goodluck Ebele Jonathan



Mr. Tobias James

Former President Goodluck Ebele Jonathan, represented by Mr. Tobias James, a former Commissioner for Education in the state, said the former president and the Goodluck Ebele Jonathan Foundation are committed to bringing peace to society. The foundation is happy to partner with the NDD in hosting the 13<sup>th</sup> session focused on stopping election violence. He described the dialogue as timely as it comes few months to the election. The intention is to promote good governance and advocate for credible, fair and transparent elections for peaceful transitions.

The credibility of any election is premised on the conduct of different stakeholders before, during and after elections. Hence, the idea of building trust and recovering spaces as the theme of the dialogue, is considered very crucial. In other to build trust between the electorates and other stakeholders, government agencies must carry out their duties with utmost patriotism.

Politicians should conduct themselves in a manner that promotes peace in society and Primaries should be conducted in a way that foster peace among the different stakeholders. It is worthy to note that elections are about service and not a contest for personal ambitions. The gubernatorial aspirants are therefore, admonished not to seek power for the purpose of enjoying privileges and entitlements, but for the common good of the people. Nobody's ambition is worth the peace and security of the citizens, so we should work together for the wellbeing of the state.

As a Foundation, we condemn all sorts of electoral violence, as no political office is worth the blood of any Bayelsan. We urge all stakeholders to commit themselves to the course of peace before, during and after the elections.

## Commitment to Explore Violence Free Elections- Aspirants



Amb. Godknows B. Igali with Dr. Erepamo Osaisai and Chief Timi Alaibe (Governorship Aspirants)

In striving to change the narrative of Bayelsa State concerning electoral violence, aspirants committed to explore nonviolence in the November governorship election. The aspirants include former Federal Permanent Secretary, Ambassador Godknows Bolade Igali; Chief Timi Alaibe, former Managing Director of the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) and former Coordinator of the Presidential Amnesty Program (PAP); and Mr. Erepamo Osaisa a reputable scientist. The aspirants took it in turn to make commitment towards ensuring that even their supporters adhere to a nonviolence process.



Chief Timi Alaibe

Chief Timi Alaibe commenced by thanking the secretariat of the Niger Delta Dialogue, AA PeaceWorks and all the international partners of the NDD for the good work. He said he was delighted to be part of the 13<sup>th</sup> NDD, while saying that the idea of ensuring peaceful elections is worth embracing especially by the people of Bayelsa State. "I want to associate myself with what is going on here. We have had a conference where former president Goodluck Ebele Jonathan did a presentation on the subject of peace building and nonviolent elections. And being a peace advocate, I want to associate myself with the work AAPeaceWorks is doing under the platform of the Niger Delta Dialogue". However, it is sad to note that violence is rooted in the failure of leadership, even the family is not an exception.

"As an aspirant, I Timi Alaibe, being part of the electioneering process, hereby commit to peaceful election and will not support anyone to carry fireworks, least of all arms, to disrupt the process". Nevertheless, he canvassed for electronic voting, which according to him, will reduce electoral malpractice and the crisis associated with it. He urged INEC to implement the electronic process which many Nigerians have also called for. On the part of security agencies, he urged them to discharge their duties patriotically.

In conclusion, he condemned the situation where leaders pay some youths who refer to themselves as street boys and are readily available to perpetrate violence to hamper the process. He said such leaders should be named and shamed so that others will desist from such acts.



**Dr. Erepmo Osaisai**

**Dr. Erepmo Osaisai** thanked the EU, AA PeaceWorks and the Goodluck Jonathan Foundation for putting the dialogue together. He stated that violence often occurs when people feel the process is unfair. Therefore, in trying to curb electoral violence, it is important to strengthen the instruments capable of enthroning fairness and transparency. Another causative factor of violence is the weak family institution. There is need to strengthen the family by inculcating sound moral values in our children and parents should be responsible for their children.

“Having said that, I Erepmo Osaisai, as an aspirant that will participate in this process, commit myself to violence free election, as sustainable development can only thrive in a peaceful environment”.



**Ambassador Godknows Igali**

Making his commitment, **Ambassador Godknows Igali** said the purpose of presenting oneself is to serve and deliver the dividends of good governance to the people. It is also to create a better society for the governed. Therefore, the philosophical foundation of being a candidate for an election, is incompatible for somebody who wants to serve to inflict on the people, suffering and violence.

“On that note, I Godknows Bolade Igali hereby declare that my action in presenting myself for electoral office is founded on the fact that there is an ethical and moral foundation”.

## Syndicate Group Discussions

Participants at the dialogue were divided into 6 groups to brainstorm and come up with workable recommendations for peaceful elections in the state:

### Group A—Organizing and Mobilizing Women for Action against Violence



**Syndicate Group**

**Where?** Women are to be organized and mobilized from the unit to ward levels in all the local government areas to vote and protect their votes as well as resist whatever may result in violence.

**Target-** To reach out to potential trouble makers with the message of nonviolent election in Bayelsa state. Women will engage other stakeholders such as the candidates contesting the election, leaders of political parties, traditional rulers, faith based organizations, INEC, security agencies, community based organizations etc. However, the primary target is to mobilize women across board who will in turn, engage other stakeholders constructively for peaceful elections.

### Who Will Take Responsibility?

- The women who are the primary drivers of the process
- Youths who understand the need for peaceful election
- Civil Society organizations like AA PeaceWorks, international donors like the EU, USAID, etc. can fund advocacy and intervention activities

**Is it state wide, LGA specific, Ward, Polling unit, or Institution specific?** The mobilization will be done at the Polling unit level organized along Ward, LGA, and State levels

**List what you hope will be the outcome or result** -Women are mobilized for violence free elections, as well as, indirectly reducing cultism and cult related violence, drug abuse, and vote buying

**Who will monitor?** There will be coordinators at the unit, ward, LGA and state levels

**Key activities**

1. Carry out sensitization on violence free election. Organize sessions that will include all stakeholders such as traditional rulers, women, youths, faith based organizations, CDCs, security agencies, INEC, market women, aspirants of the 2019 local government election
2. Mass mobilization of women against violence of all kind.

**Group B – Organizing and Mobilizing Youth for Action against Violence**

**Where?** The current security situation and dynamics in Bayelsa State are very precarious. The state is characterized by the following:

- Non-conclusive electoral processes
- Using youths as tools for violence
- Rising political thuggery
- Kidnapping of perceived opponents
- Cultism and drug abuse
- Using the power of incumbency
- Vote buying and voter apathy
- Unemployment
- Illegal acquisition and circulation of fire arms

**What are you targeting?** A nonviolent election in Bayelsa State by mobilizing and organizing youths. Targeted organizations are: the IYC, community youth leaders, religious bodies, security agencies, cultural institutions, educational institutions, security agencies, youth wing of PANDEF, the media, INEC, National Orientation Agency (NOA), politicians, and others.

**Specific activities to include:**

- Sensitization campaigns on nonviolence
- Town hall meetings
- Voter education
- Stakeholder engagement through targeted advocacy

**Who will take Responsibility?**

- a) Civil Society organizations
- b) Faith based organizations
- c) Community youth leaders and IYC
- d) Security agencies to provide unbiased support

- e) Traditional rulers' council
- f) Women social groups
- g) International donors like the EU, USAID, etc.

**Is it state wide, LGA specific, Ward, Polling unit, or Institution specific?** Four LGAs (Brass, Nembe, Southern Ijaw and Ekeremor) are the major targets.

**List what you hope will be the outcome or result** -Four thousand youths mobilized across the state against violent elections

**Who will monitor?** AA PeaceWorks/ NDD; PANDEF; INC; IYC and others



**Elder T.K. Ogoriba**

**Group C – Engaging Critical Stakeholders: Who, Why, How, and When?**

The critical stakeholders identified include Political parties, Security agencies, Voters, Media, Election Management Bodies and aspirants/candidates

**Why?**

- Political parties are vehicles for the emergence of new government. As sponsors of candidates, their failure to play by the rules could lead to electoral violence
- They provide security and maintain law and order. They provide security during the voting process. They are responsible for the prosecution of offenders of electoral laws
- They vote the candidate of their choice into power. Their actions or inaction can lead to violence
- Media plays a great role in escalating or deescalating violence during election period. Bias, fake news, insensitive reportage can lead to violent elections
- Their duty is to conduct free, fair, and credible elections. They are a major stakeholder in the election process

They are key players and largely influence actions that lead to violence

How?

- Through advocacy visit and capacity building using the platform for mobilizing parties such as the inter party advisory committee etc.
  - Sensitization and voter education through town hall meetings
  - Capacity building for media practitioners on conflict sensitive reporting as well as advocacy visits to media houses
  - Organizing readiness meetings interactive session between Election Management Bodies and other
  - Advocacy visits to aspirants/ candidates urging them to run issues-based campaigns;
- When?

All activities mentioned above should be done before, during and after the elections.



**Syndicate Group**

## **Group D – Promoting Peace: A Post Election Action Plan.**

**Where?**

All the LGAs of Bayelsa state. Yenagoa and Southern Ijaw LGAs will be given more attention due to their voting strength and difficult terrain.

**Target?** Reducing post-election violence and promoting peace in all the LGAs of the state. Putting in place mechanism for collating early warning data so that there will be quick response to any post-election violence.

**Who will take responsibility?**

It is the responsibility of all stakeholders (political parties, candidates, community leaders, security, CSOs, CBOs, FBOs). However, a credible organization such as AA PeaceWorks should lead the process of post-election peace building.

**Is it state wide, LGA specific, Ward, Polling unit, or Institution specific?** A state-wide intervention will be implemented.

**List what you hope will be the outcome or result**

A peaceful and prosperous Bayelsa with an all-inclusive government. Reduction in cult-related killings and crime.

**Key activities**

Specific actions to be considered are:

1. Disarmament/ demilitarization of communities after elections
2. Demobilization of armed groups
3. Curb/ monitor movement into communities – imposition of curfew in hotspots to reduce tension
4. Securing local agreements
5. Carry out the engagement of critical stakeholders. Getting key actors to meet immediately after the elections to reaffirm commitments to peace
6. Post-election press briefing by candidates
7. Immediate prosecution of perpetrators of electoral violence
8. Compensation and rehabilitation of victims of violence

## **Group E – Strong Voice for Inclusive Governance in a Post-Election Setting.**

**Where?**

All the LGAs of Bayelsa state.

**What are you targeting?** Good governance and sustainable development.

**Who will take responsibility?**

- a) Elected officials – State Governor, House of Assembly members, Local government chairmen
- b) Civil society group,
- c) Youths group
- d) Political parties

**Is it state wide, LGA specific, Ward, Polling unit, or Institution specific?** A state-wide strategy will be adopted.

**List what you hope will be the outcome or result**

A government where every voice is important. An all-inclusive government. Other outcomes include:

1. Adequate citizens' participation
2. Reduction in crime for peace and stability
3. Even development of communities
4. Accountability by persons in positions
5. Justice and the rule of law

**Who will monitor?** Relevant stakeholders, especially the CSOs.

## **Group F – Engaging the media on conflict sensitive reporting**

**Where?** The intervention will take place in all of Bayelsa State

**What are you targeting?** The focus will be on media practitioners. Organize and build their capacity for balanced and unbiased reportage by engaging in investigative journalism. Emphasis will also be on engaging social media influencers to stop spreading fake news and hate speeches

**Who will take responsibility?** INEC; CSOs; traditional rulers; and the media houses

**Is it state wide, LGA specific, Ward, Polling unit, or Institution specific?** The intervention is state-wide with specific focus on identified

hotspots

**List what you hope will be the outcome or result**

- Better dissemination of information
- Minimized violence during and after the elections
- Promotion of issues-based campaigns

**Who will monitor?**

Nigeria Broadcasting Corporation, INEC and Civil Society Organizations

## Vote of thanks

Honourable **Ken Robinson** of PANDEF appreciated the organizers, conveners, aspirants, guests and everyone who made it to the dialogue.

He advised that the success of the forthcoming election was the responsibility of everyone; hence, all hands must be on deck to make it a success.



**Participants listening to presentations at the 13th NDD**

Attendance List for 13<sup>th</sup> NDD held 9-10 July, 2019 at the Lady Diamo Memorial Event Place, Yenagoa

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## Attendance List for 13<sup>th</sup> NDD held 9-10 July, 2019 at the Lady Diamo Memorial Event Place, Yenagoa

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## Attendance List for 13<sup>th</sup> NDD held 9-10 July, 2019 at the Lady Diamo Memorial Event Place, Yenagoa

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Attendance List for 13<sup>th</sup> NDD held 9-10 July, 2019 at the Lady Diama Memorial Event Place, Yenagoa

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