

Goldman Prize winner affirms oil-rich Niger Delta still a land of misery



Four Nigerian farmers take on Shell in a Dutch court on Thursday, accusing the oil giant of destroying their livelihoods in a case that could set a precedent for global environmental responsibility. (Photo by ROBIN UTRECHT / ANP / AFP)

The Hague, May 27 (RHC)-- Nigerian environmental lawyer Chima Williams has been named the Africa recipient of the 2022 Goldman Environmental Prize, known as the "Green Nobel Prize" for grassroots advocacy to protect the environment.

The top environment prize, annually awarded to six grassroots activists – one from each of the world's continents save for Antarctica – was announced on Wednesday.

Williams, acting executive director of Friends of the Earth Nigeria (Environmental Rights Action), was recognised for his role in helping the Goi and Oruma communities of the oil-rich Niger Delta region get justice.

In January 2021, after 13 years of litigation, a Dutch court awarded damages to the communities for oil spills which happened between 2004-2007 due to exploration by a subsidiary of by oil conglomerate Royal Dutch Shell. It was a landmark ruling as it marked the first time a parent company was being liable for acts of its subsidiary in the delta.

Oil and gas are vital to the economy of Africa's largest oil producer and account for almost half of the country's GDP. However, the delta where Shell first began commercial exploration in 1956, suffers from penury and up to 70 percent of the population encounter gas flares and polluted sources of water on a daily basis.

Life expectancy in the region is estimated to be 49 years, 10 years lower than the rest of the country.

More than 50 U.S. lawmakers have so far called for an investigation into the crime as Tel Aviv is refusing to launch a probe. And over 100 leading artists from across the world have also condemned Israel's killing of Abu Akleh, demanding accountability for the regime's crimes.

The International Criminal Court (ICC) has already opened an investigation into possible war crimes by Israel in both the occupied West Bank and the Gaza Strip. However, Israel does not recognize the court's jurisdiction and has called the war crimes probe unfair and anti-Semitic.

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