

**ADDRESS BY HIS EXCELLENCY, SENATOR DOUYE DIRI,
EXECUTIVE GOVERNOR OF BAYELSA STATE, NIGERIA,
AT THE UNVEILING OF THE UNITED
NATIONS CONVENTION FOR THE CONSERVATION
OF RIVER DELTAS, EXPOCITY, COP 28, DUBAI - 4TH
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(PROTOCOL)

Let me, on behalf of the delegation from Bayelsa State, commend the UNFCCC and the government of the United Arab Emirates for the successful hosting of this landmark event. That we can gather in this picturesque city of Dubai from all over the world at this time, underscores our sense of commitment and determination to save our planet.

I must state, as earlier underlined by the leader of the entire Nigerian delegation, His Excellency, President Bola Ahmed Tinubu, that the new global compact which is emerging from COP 28 gives us all hope for a better tomorrow. This is why I join leaders, especially of sub -nationals, from some of the most vulnerable and impacted communities, the DELTAs to re-echo a clarion call. We need little activism to restate that the world's deltas and wetlands are increasingly facing extinction.

From my own Niger Delta, the impact of climate change continues to wreak unimaginable havoc on our environment, ecosystem, and human resources. Unlike other regions of planet Earth, our plight is confounded from both ends, creating a case of "double jeopardy." On the one hand, rising incidents of flooding and land degradation from torrential rainfalls and inland water systems are common places. In recent years, such mobster floods, rising unimaginable levels, have left footprints in my home Bayelsa State, and many other places in the Niger Delta in Nigeria. Such specific reports have also come from other river deltas across the world.

Ladies and Gentlemen matters are sadly worsening by the spectre of rising sea levels, which has severally been discussed at various sessions during this conference. Clearly a product of human activities, resulting in depletion of ozone layers and resultant melting of glacier water, the ocean waters around our coastal areas are swelling daily.

The oceans around our deltas have therefore continued to mount an unprecedented assault on our fishing ports, villages, and towns. In the past few years, at least twenty (20) of our coastal communities in my state have become almost submerged or lost a substantial amount of land to the surging and rising sea waters. These include Agge, Akassa, Agoro, Brass, Ekine, Ezetu, Foropa, Kolokuma 1 & 2, Odioma, Okpoma, etc.

According to the scientific reports from our experts, between 1991 to 2018, the shorelines of Bayelsa, its neighbours Rivers State and Akwa Ibom State witnessed considerable retreat and erosion, with respective measurements of 81,532 metres 17,519 metres and 8,590 metres. The rates of shoreline migration and erosion were recorded at 11.1 metres per year ,7.2 metres per year and 5.5 metres per year. In the context of erosion along the Nigerian coast, Bayelsa alone accounted for **66.6%** of the erosion and shoreline retreat, while Rivers and Akwa Ibom contributed 14.43% and 10.63%, respectively.

In October 2022, my State encountered devastating floods resulting in the near submersion of the **entire state**, including its capital city, Yenagoa. The UN Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator in Nigeria and Representative of the Secretary General, Mr Matthias Schmale at my invitation, visited Bayelsa and accompanied me on a tour of some of the flood impacted communities. At the end of the tour, he observed, and I quote “what I saw reminded me of the images I saw of Pakistan; and the world took note of that. This is a crisis of major proportion that deserves everyone’s attention”

Individuals lost their lives, homes, farmlands and livelihoods. As a government, we could not turn a blind eye to the myriad of challenges and sought proactive solutions. This has rendered governance more financially burdensome, an issue that warrants global focus and intervention. As leaders, it is incumbent upon us to devise effective short and long term solutions such as sustenance, shelter, alternative educational facilities for children, and the protection of vulnerable members of society, particularly the girl child.

During my visits to affected communities, I recognized the urgency in managing our deltas, water bodies, sea-level rise, biodiversity, and the consequential livelihood losses of our mangroves, as well as the

pollution of our deltas. These endeavours will significantly contribute to addressing food insecurity, hunger, migration, and the associated settlements and conflicts.

Projections indicate that a one-meter rise in sea levels in Nigeria could compel up to 80 percent of the delta's population to seek higher ground, flood 18,000 km² of land, result in damages valued at US\$9 billion, and necessitate the relocation of up to 3.7 million people. These alarming consequences of climate change are not limited to the Nigerian Niger Delta region but are shared by coastal deltas worldwide. We also believe that this figure will be higher if inland deltas and hinterlands of existing deltas are included.

This is why we join in the "Deltas Unite" to cry to the rest of the world to work with us to address this situation. The government of Bayelsa State will, therefore, continue to support and give priority attention to all activities and programmes of Deltas Unite. While this effort at our end is directly domiciled in the Office of the Executive Governor, we will continue to assemble the best of technical, professional, and administrative expertise.

In this vein, I would like to announce the readiness of the government of Bayelsa State to host The Inaugural International Summit of the Deltas in Yenagoa, Bayelsa State, Nigeria in 2024. This will enable our various experts, who by the way have done incredible work so far, to further interface and articulate our common positions on the pertinent issues. Of outmost priority is the need to bring our plight to the front burner as a major thematic issue, especially a United Nations programme on Conservation of River Deltas (UN- CCRD).

The unveiling of the United Nations Convention for Conserving River Deltas (UNCCRD) represents a pivotal step in our collective efforts.

It is imperative that we engage extensively with the United Nations (UN) and encourage more nations to endorse our coordinated initiative aimed at safeguarding the lives and livelihoods of the millions of people residing in river and ocean-facing deltas. We cannot overlook the undeniable reality that the sustenance of a burgeoning populace, hinges significantly on these deltas, encompassing crucial global climate change mitigation efforts.

Consequently, we must accord paramount importance to their preservation and governance.

Our collaborative mandate following COP28 entails the operationalization of the UN Convention for Conserving River Deltas UNCCRD commencing next year

We are compelled to seize this opportunity to safeguard the lives, cultural heritage, and sustenance of the millions reliant on our deltas for survival. Our deltas are not merely repositories of wealth but also hold the potential to substantially mitigate the multifaceted challenges posed by global climate change, aiming to achieve significant progress by 2030.

In addition, we cannot overlook the profound impact of oil pollution on our deltas, as evidenced in the damning findings of the Bayelsa State Oil and Environmental Commission (BSOEC) Report. The report serves as a stark reminder of the environmental challenges stemming from oil pollution in our region. It is my firm belief that the newly unveiled United Nations Convention for Conserving River Deltas (UNCCRD) holds promise in addressing these pressing issues.

Bringing all stakeholders together, including indigenous people and local communities, is the “game changer” in the management of our global deltas. The United Nations Convention for Conserving River Deltas (UNCCRD) provides the right platform for citizens’ participation in the governance of their deltas.

I therefore, encourage you not to relent in supporting the United Nations Convention for Conserving River Deltas UNCCRD until it is operationalized.

Finally, permit me to appreciate the United Nations (UN) for providing us this platform to further engage and recognize UNCCRD for the protection of our global deltas.

Thank you all for listening.