

**LEAD DEBATE ON A BILL FOR AN ACT TO AMEND NIGER-DELTA
DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION (ESTABLISHMENT, ETC) ACT, 2000.**

Sponsored by: Senator Peter Nwaoboshi (Delta North)

Mr. President, Distinguished Colleagues, permit me to lead the debate on the general principles of the Bill for an Act to amend Niger-Delta Development Commission (Establishment, etc) Act, 2000. The Bill was read for the first time on Wednesday, the 26th day of July, 2017.

Distinguished Colleagues, this Bill is intended to augment and strengthen the Principal Act so as to clarify certain provisions of the Act, obliterate obvious lacunas and propel the Commission towards excellent service delivery, which will in turn impact positively on the Niger Delta Region and the nation in general.

Distinguished Colleagues, it would be recalled that this hallowed Chamber, at its sitting on Tuesday, 11th October, 2016, while considering the request of the President and Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces of Nigeria for the confirmation of the Chairman and members of the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) observed certain ambiguities in the Niger-Delta Development Commission (Establishment, etc) Act, 2000 and thereupon, mandated the Committee on Niger Delta to carry out a review of the Act.

Distinguished Colleagues, the Committee ensured that a comprehensive review was carried out, as major stakeholders were also consulted and their inputs equally considered and all of which culminated into the provisions of the Bill, which I believe would definitely take care of the lapses in the Principal Act.

Mr. President and Distinguished Colleagues, it would also be recalled that the setting up of the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) in 2000 through the Principal Act was to accelerate the development of the Niger Delta Region and consequently stem the

spate of restiveness in the region, which was impacting negatively on national resources. The Commission to some extent has been executing its lofty mandate, but for the obvious impediments, particularly, in the area of funding. It has therefore, become necessary to review the Principal Act, so as to reposition the Commission in carrying out its core mandate efficiently.

Distinguished Colleagues, I will not belabour you with so much details, suffice to make reference to Section 2 (1) (b) of the Act, which states as follows:

“There is hereby established for the commission a Governing Board (in this Act referred to as “the Board”) which shall consist of –

(b) one person who shall be an indigene of an oil producing area to represent each of the following member States, that is –

- I. Abia State
- II. Akwa Ibom State
- III. Bayelsa State
- IV. Cross River State
- V. Delta State
- VI. Edo State
- VII. Imo State
- VIII. Ondo State; and
- IX. Rivers State”.

It turned out that the interpretation of “an indigene of an oil producing area” has been problematic for oil producing area seems to be quite amorphous. This Bill has taken care of the issue by clarifying the phrase to read thus: **an indigene of an oil producing Local Government Area**. I believe, this has resolved the issue once and for all.

Distinguished Colleagues, an onerous challenge being encountered by NDDC since its establishment in 2000 is in the area of funding,

particularly, delay or default in release of fund for it to carry out its functions. For instance, the Commission is being owed the sum of over N1.8 trillion, while its debt profile is over N1 trillion. Worst still, in breach of the provision of the Act, no money from ecological fund has ever been released to the Commission, neither has gas processing companies paid the 3% statutory fund to it. However, Section 14 of the Act which provides for fund for the Commission has been strengthened to ensure prompt release of statutory funds to the Commission.

Distinguished Colleagues, there are adequate statutes to ensure proper utilization of the funds, more so, the National Assembly will definitely carry out its oversight function over the Commission, to ensure accountability in the utilization of the fund.

Accordingly, it is imperative to amend the Niger-Delta Development Commission (Establishment, etc) Act, 2000, so as to pave the way for more efficient running of the Commission.

I therefore, urge you Distinguished Colleagues to support the passage of this Bill.

Thank you.