As Nigeria marks its 60th independence anniversary, the Niger Delta Congress reckons that it has become imperative and necessary for the ethnic nationalities of the region to reflect on the current state of the region and of what benefit the Nigerian state has been to us.

For over fifty years, the Niger Delta has been a crime scene of epic proportion, a living monument to the injustice of man to his fellow man. In this period, the people have been economically and politically marginalized, while our mineral resources have been rapaciously exploited for the benefit of all except the Niger Delta people themselves. To ensure that this plundering continues, the Nigerian state has employed violence of varying degrees, including on a genocidal scale, to subjugate and silence the people. This has been so in various Niger Delta communities including but not limited to Odi, communities in Gbaramatu, communities in Ogoni, Egi, Ika, etc and also the murder of nine Ogoni activists in 1995.

As a result of this violent exploitation of the land and resources of the Niger Delta people, the Niger Delta environment has been completely devastated by hydrocarbon pollution which has killed off our aquatic life and rendered our rivers unfishable, destroyed our lands and made it unfarmable, polluted our groundwater and made it undrinkable; and poisoned our atmosphere with flares, rendering our rains acidic and our air cancerous. This has brought about an increase in cancers, birth defects, child mortality, reduced brain neuroplasticity, and numerous other health challenges, which have individually and collectively ensured that life expectancy in the region now stands at 41years, one of the lowest in the world.

Economically, the Niger Delta people have been emasculated and purposely underdeveloped. This has been done by legitimizing the expropriation of the resources of the people while leaving behind crumbs now popularly referred to as the “13% derivation.” The Nigerian state has, in attempting to stifle the development of the region, drafted a constitution and an accompanying set of laws that actively prevents the region from harnessing its human and natural resources, and developing the necessary infrastructure to drive its growth and development. This has consequently killed the hopes and aspirations of majority of the people of the region. Despite being the source of over 90% of Nigeria’s budget expenditure, and over 70% of its foreign exchange earnings, the Niger Delta now accounts for the highest unemployment and underemployment rate in the country at over five million persons as has been revealed by the National Bureau of Statistics. And also, while the Niger Delta people have been prevented from controlling our resources, our counterparts in the North have been given the presidential right to control and exploit their own resources.

Politically, the Niger Delta people have been marginalized and underrepresented in public institutions. As recently as 2019, the first Chief Justice of Nigeria to originate from Southern Nigeria in over 30 years, Justice Walter Onnoghen was unceremoniously removed on trumped up charges in one of the most brazen display of ethnic and religious prejudice ever seen in this country. Recruitment into government agencies and public institutions have continued to be skewed against the people of the region. Recent recruitment into the security agencies have shown an insignificant representation from the region, and a disproportionate representation from the Northern region, making it appear like the people of the region and Southern Nigeria in general are being systematically purged to make way for the Northernisation of the country’s security agencies.

The recent threat to the region and its people from islamic jihadist, and an ethnic Fulani militia who both appear to have the tacit support of some members of Nigeria’s security agencies and government officials who share similar ethnic and religious ideologies also calls for greater introspection.

Considering the current realities of the region which includes the economic shift away from fossil fuel usage, the economic injustice against our people, the destruction of our environment and home, and the islamic jihadist threat to our existence, makes this decade a defining moment for the people of this region. As such, going forward, the Niger Delta Congress calls for a complete restructuring of the country to ensure that the Niger Delta people have economic and political autonomy. Where the restructuring of the country shows no sign of materializing in the shortest possible time, the Niger Delta Congress will have no option but to organize the Niger Delta people and push for the formation of a Niger Delta Republic, and a secession of same.

God bless the Niger Delta.