GET THE POINT

Dumping Toxic Waste in Africa: Environmental Racism and Violation of Human Rights

By Fritz Pointer

Environmental Racism is a term that's used to describe a form of systemic racism – manifested through policies and practices that force people to live in proximity to sources of toxic waste. As a student of African Literature, one who has both read and taught the brilliant Nigerian novelist, Chinua Achebe, who in the early 1980's made me aware of the dumping of toxic waste from Western (white) countries and companies in Africa. e says, in an interview with Bill Moyers: "There are officials who take money so **toxic waste** can be dumped in their territories. There are examples of people who cart away the wealth of their nations to Europe, to Swiss banks. Western Countries and Companies are dumping their toxic waste in Africa – bribing and coercing leaders and officials." This was the early 1980s.

According to the United Nations, Human Rights and the Environment are intertwined; human rights cannot be enjoyed without a safe, clean and healthy environment; and sustainable environmental governance cannot exist without the establishment of and respect for human rights. This relationship is increasingly recognized - as the right to a healthy environment is enshrined in over 100 constitutions. Oddly, Ghana, Nigeria and the Ivory Coast are not among them.

There must be Global Governance, Global Oversight when it comes to this matter of disposing of toxic waste, especially e-waste. In Ghana, each month, hundreds of thousands of tons of used electronics, mainly from Europe and the United States, are delivered in huge containers. In Nigeria, up to 100,000 people work in the informal e-waste sector, processing half a million tons of discarded

appliances each year. How much can planet earth endure? How much can Mother Africa endure? (see attached article)

UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein said: "Violations of environmental rights have a profound impact on a wide variety of human rights, including the right to life itself, food, water, health, sanitation, housing, cultural and civil and political rights." Rather than reactive, the ***Earth Constitution*** is proactive and stipulates that: 8.6.1 "The functions of the agency for Technological and Environmental Assessment shall be: To establish and maintain a registration and description of all significant technological innovations, **together with impact projections**…8.6.1.4 To maintain a global monitoring network to measure possible harmful effects of technological innovations and environmental disturbances so that corrective measures can be designed." There's more but I think you get the point. Let us conclude with this from Achebe:

> We (Capitalist adherents) have given ourselves over so completely to selfishness that we hurt not only those around us but ourselves even more deeply; that one must assume the blunting of the imagination and a sense of danger of truly psychiatric proportions.

The dumping of hazardous waste must be recognized by the United Nations and its member states as a violation of human rights.