

Introducing Mr. Noble Obani-Nwibari

A Nigeria—Shell Refugee

Calvin College

1997

Ladies and Gentlemen

I am most happy to introduce to you Mr. Noble Obani-Nwibari, a political refugee from Nigeria. Brother Noble comes from a country that has a very special place in the hearts of the members of the CRC. He comes from a country where many members of the CRC have invested significant part of their lives in missions. The CRC has invested more money on Nigeria than any other part of the world. And I dare say, she has sent up more prayers for Nigeria and its people than for any other country. More Calvin alumni have served in Nigeria than in any other foreign country. In other words, we have a very deep and profound investment in Nigeria. And so, when a country like that is in trouble, we have special reasons to be concerned and to pay attention.

It was many years ago. Our speaker was only 10 years old, when I became acutely conscious of the relationship AND frequent contradiction between two types of investment: missions and multinationals. It was in the late 60s and I was in Nigeria as a missionary. But I also had another presence in Nigeria. I had invested in a mutual fund that included Shell.¹ During the Nigerian Civil War, the newspapers kept writing stories about Shell, complaining that Shell was exploiting that terrible war for its own advantage. I had no way of

¹ *Every Square Inch*, vol. 2, pp. 254-255, 464-465.

determining the truth of the matter. Neither did I know of any way of influencing the situation.

So, there I was in Nigeria with two faces – as a missionary with the Gospel of Liberation and as an investor in a company that, judging from all I heard, was anything but liberating. I was caught up in a terrible contradiction. I divested myself and thus became aware of the need of what is now known as socially responsible investing.

I realized that I was one of many caught up in that kind of contradiction. In fact, even the CRC as a church and Calvin as a college have been caught up in that same contradiction through their investments of Ministers Pension Fund, Non-ordained Pension Fund and Calvin College staff pension funds through outside investment instruments. I decided therefore to help make the church aware of this contradiction by writing a book on the subject.

Since then, many things have changed but not for the better. Through the years the behaviour of Shell appears to have become increasingly oppressive and ecologically irresponsible. I have seen pictures and videos of the damage and they shocked me. We have witnessed the execution of leaders of the Ogoni people, the people who should have been blessed by the presence of Shell, but who instead had their land destroyed. The oil boom had turned for them into an oil doom.

Brother Noble has been deeply involved in the Ogoni situation. He was a close friend of KEN SARO-WIWA, the executed leader of the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP). He soon became Vice President of MOSOP and has been on the run from the Nigerian government since 1994. Neither he nor MOSOP are small fry. He almost could not make it to Grand Rapids at this time, for he was to

attend an event in Geneva dealing with Unrepresented Nations and Peoples. The conflict was resolved when this event was rescheduled.

He is now in this country as a political refugee, living and working in St. Louis, Missouri, with his wife, but his children are still in Nigeria. Can you imagine how uncomfortable that situation is? Brother Noble is a man who is suffering for his conviction and for his people.

So friends, please help make Brother Noble feel at home amongst us, his brothers and sisters, his supporters in the struggle for justice and environment. Brother Noble, I hope you will not only tell your story but also indicate to us what we here in this country and in this church can do in support of your struggle.

Ladies and Gentlemen: BROTHER NOBLE OBANI-NWIBARI