Oil spills in the Niger Delta are a tragedy, and Shell Petroleum Development Company of Nigeria (SPDC) takes them very seriously. That is why we have always accepted responsibility for paying compensation when they occur as a result of operational failure. SPDC has always acknowledged that the two spills in the Bodo area in 2008, which are the focus of extensive media reports today, were caused by such operational failure. Even when, as is true in the great majority of cases, spills are caused by illegal activity such as sabotage or theft, we are also committed to cleaning up spilt oil and restoring the surrounding land.

It is unfortunate that some inaccurate reporting has created the impression that SPDC in particular and oil companies in general are responsible for all oil spills in Nigeria. The two spills at issue here resulted in around 4,000 barrels of oil being spilt. It is regrettable that any oil is spilt anywhere, but it is wildly inaccurate to suggest that those two spills represent anything like the scale which some reports refer to. Equally, speculation by the plaintiffs' lawyers as to the level of compensation which may be payable is misguided and massively in excess of the true position.

Concerted effort is needed on the part of the Nigerian government (which itself owns a majority interest in the assets operated by SPDC under a joint operating agreement with the Nigerian state oil company, NNPC), working with oil companies and others, to end the blight of illegal refining and oil theft in the Niger Delta, both of which perpetuate poverty. This is the major cause of the environmental damage which media reports have so graphically illustrated.

Mutiu Sunmonu
Managing Director
Shell Petroleum Development Company of Nigeria Ltd