Written by Alaba Johnson
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Northerners hold 83 per cent of oil blocks – Senator

AMID a raging debate on the Petroleum Industry Bill, Chairman of the Senate Committee on Business and Rules, Senator Ita Enang, on Wednesday, said that 83 per cent of oil blocks in the country are owned by Northerners.

“There should be equity and federal character in the allocation of oil blocks in this country. Eighty-three per cent of all present oil blocks are held by northerners,” Enang said on the floor of the Senate, without any of the senior lawmakers contradicting him.

Enang, representing Akwa Ibom North-East (Uyo) Senatorial District, therefore demanded a review of oil block licences in the country even as other senators from the South urged him on.

Enang’s disclosures came a day after the debate on the Petroleum Industry Bill had split the senators along North-South lines. The senators held a rowdy session as those from the north stoutly opposed the provision of 10 per cent Host Community Fund in the bill.

The provision requires operating companies in the Niger Delta, home to Nigeria’s vast oil resource, to pay 10 per cent of their net profits to the fund for the development of the communities.

Strengthening his submission, Senator Enang gave a summary of major oil blocks vis-a-vis their ownership.

Enang said Cavendish Petroleum, the operators of OML 110, awarded to Alhaji Mai Deribe of Borno State (North East), makes an average of about N4bn monthly.

He said, “Seplat/Platform Petroleum, operators of the ASUOKPU/UMUTU marginal field has Prince Sanusi Lamido (not CBN Governor) as a major shareholder and Director.

“South Atlantic Petroleum Limited (SAPETRO), was established by Gen. Theophilus Yakubu Danjuma, who is also the Chairman of ENI Nigeria Limited. SAPETRO partnered with Total Upstream Nigeria Limited (TUPNI) and Brasoil Oil Services Company Nigeria Lomited to become operators of the OPL 246.

“AMNI International Petroleum and Development Company is owned by Alhaji (Colonel) Sani Bello of Kotangora, Niger State. They are operators of OML 112 and OML 117.

“A former Petroleum minister and former OPEC chairman, Rilwanu Lukman, another northerner, manages AMNI oil blocks and with very key interests in the NNPC/Vitol trading deal.

“Oriental Energy Resources Limited, a company owned by Alhaji Indimi, runs three oil blocks: OML 15, the Okwok field and the Ebok field.

“Alhaji Aminu Dantata’s Express Petroleum and Gas Limited operates OML 108.

“OML 113 allocated to Yinka Folawiyo Petroleum Limited is owned by Alhaji. W.I. Folawiyo.

“OPL 291 was awarded to Starcrest Energy Nigeria Limited, owned by Emeka Offor, which was sold by Starcrest to Addax Petroleum. Emeka Offor still has a stake in Addax operations in Nigeria.

“Mike Adenuga’s Conoil is the oldest indigenous oil exploration industry in Nigeria with six oil blocks;

“Alhaji Saleh Mohammed Gambo’s North East Petroleum Limited is the holder of the OPL 215 licence. NOREASTER Petroleum was awarded blocks OPL 276 and OPL 283 and closing thereupon a Joint Venture Agreement with Centrica Resources Nigeria Limited and CCC Oil and Gas.

“INTEL is owned by (Abubakar) Atiku, Yar’Adua and Ado Bayero and has substantial stakes in Nigeria’s oil exploration industry, both in Nigeria and Sao Tome and Principe.

“These need to be looked into, revoked and re-awarded. The Federal Character which is a principle applicable in every aspect of our national existence should also be brought to bear in the application of our oil blocks, marginal fields and prospecting licences.”

Enang’s disclosures came amid a consensus among the lawmakers on the need to let the bill sail through second reading, while further legislative work would take care of the contentious issues.

Enang, who spoke in support of the PIB, also argued for the retention of the 10 per cent host community fund, adding that it did not amount to an additional derivation.

Speaking also in favour of the bill, Senator Chris Anyanwu (Imo East) said the bill would address the issue of criminality in the sector.

She said, “The element I like most in the bill is the host community fund because it removes the motive for crime. It gives them a sense of belonging and ownership. Until the PIB is ready and people know that their investment is safe, they will not come to Nigeria.”

Senator Ayogu Eze from Enugu North also urged his colleagues to support the bill so as allow for the fine-tuning of other controversial areas.

Senator Olufemi Lanlehin (Oyo South) argued that Section 191 of the bill gave too much powers to the President, which must be curtailed.

Norther senators whose earlier position was outright rejection of the bill have moved to give the bill a chance.

Senator Danjuma Goje (Gombe Central) captured the new mood when he said, “I was one of the people completely opposed to the bill but from the trend of the debate it looked like the Senate is ready to do a thorough job without fear or favour. For this reason, I will join others in asking that this bill be considered while the contentious positions are addressed.

“It is necessary that the powers of the minister be reduced so that whosoever is the minister is not a super minister.”

In spite of this, Deputy Leader, Abdul Ningi (Bauchi Central); Senators Abdullahi Adamu (Nasarawa West); Ahmed Makarfi (Kaduna North); and Nurudeen Abatemi (Kogi Central) raised concerns on the provisions for host communities’ fund.

They also expressed hope that the issue would be properly thrashed at the critical stages of the bill.

The debate on the general principles of the bill would be concluded on Thursday (today).