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Big Oil and an activist's death

FRONT PAGE
Family sues to probe role played by Shell in Nigerian's execution

By Elizabeth Neuffer
GLOBE STAFF

NEW YORK — Just who is to blame for the death of Ken Saro-Wiwa?

No one disputes that the Nigerian author and environmental activist, who rallied thousands in a signal protest against Western oil companies, was dragged from his African home by armed men in the darkness of the night.

No one questions that a tribunal appointed by Nigeria's dictator, General Sani Abacha, found Saro-Wiwa guilty of murder in a sham trial. No one questions that on Nov. 12, 1995, an executioner hanged him — transforming a man into a martyr.

What Saro-Wiwa's family wants confirmed is this: the allegation that the largest oil company in Nigeria, Royal Dutch Petroleum/Shell, conspired with Abacha's regime in Saro-Wiwa's death, desperate to silence the man who had brought its lucrative oil operations to a halt.



AP FILE PHOTO

Owens Saro-Wiwa, protesting in Toronto in 1996 against what he sees as Royal Dutch Shell's role in his brother Ken's death.



REUTERS FILE PHOTO

Ken Saro-Wiwa, who rallied against oil companies in Nigeria, was executed after a sham trial.

A recent US Supreme Court decision should let answers to that question emerge, allowing a long-stalled civil lawsuit brought by Saro-Wiwa's family against the oil giant to proceed in US District Court in Manhattan.

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