
Interview: Col. Yakubu Mu'azu

Nigeria's fight for development: the experience of Sokoto state

Colonel Mu'azu is the military administrator of Nigeria's Sokoto state. He was interviewed by Lawrence Freeman on April 29 in Sokoto.

EIR: The state of Sokoto is very important in history and culture in Nigeria, especially for northern Nigeria. Could you fill our readers in on some of the significance of Sokoto?

Mu'azu: As you have rightly mentioned, Sokoto really forms the necklace of what used to be northern Nigeria, the modern northern Nigeria. It is the base from which the renowned Jihadist Usman Bin Fodio established, over 100 years ago, an administration, jurisdiction, and learning—Islamic learning—that captured not only the whole of northern Nigeria, but a great part of West Africa, cutting across Nigeria to what is now known as Mali. Therefore, it was a quite wide influence. It was an excellent administration that was established, so much so that when the British came in, they decided to continue with that form of administration, or indirect rule, because there was an excellent system of administration, an excellent system of judiciary, tax collection, and the like. Sokoto became the center of learning, the center of administration, and the power base. That has influenced happenings in Nigeria for some time.

We have two great leaders of Nigeria who came out of what is now Sokoto state: the late Sir Ahmadu Bello and the former President, the first and only Executive President, President Shagari.

We have been contributing to the development of our country, to ensure its political viability and economic well-being, as well as social well-being.

EIR: Could you say something about the history of the Fulani coming into Hausa and how this shaped the culture here, that was considered different than the southern culture of Nigeria?

Mu'azu: Usman Bin Fodio was a Fulani man. He brought with him his culture. Anybody who is learned in the history of West Africa and the history of the Fulani knows that the Fulani people, even when they conquer a place, adopt the culture of the people they conquer, rather than imposing their own culture. Therefore, I sincerely believe it was an

adaptation of the culture of the people who are here, mostly growers and so forth. I am not very good in the history of how the whole thing happened, so I do not want to make serious mistakes. Nevertheless, what Sheikh Bin Fodio brought was Islam, and Islam has its own system of jurisdiction, of administration, concerning believers and non-believers, which I believe shaped the destiny and the way the people think, up till now.

There is nothing wrong now between the north and the south per se. When you look at Nigeria, differences in religion abound. There are many Muslims in the south, as there are many in the north; there are Christians in the north, as there are Christians in the south. The only thing you can say is, perhaps, that some parts of Nigeria are more dominated by certain religions than others. The differences have been blended over the years, either because of people accepting other people's faith, or because of the unity and destiny of the country, Nigeria, itself. I believe that is unifying Nigeria, rather than bringing a difference.

EIR: Could you tell us about Sokoto state—what are the industries, the major occupations, the areas that you have targeted for development, as the military administrator of the state?

Mu'azu: That is one of the ironies of Sokoto state. Having been the center of administration, power, and learning, today Sokoto is without basic infrastructure, as far as industries are concerned. A few were started, a few are still going on, but definitely a lot still needs to be done. Sokoto state is agrarian; it lives mostly on the land. It is that way because of the river that crosses the state—the Sokoto River. We have two big dams, the Goranyo and the Bakalori dams. They are excellent reservoirs, with which you can carry out irrigation throughout the year. There are also other dams, like Kamalo, Kware, and of course the Wurno dam, just to name a few. There are some smaller ones scattered around the state.

The state is very arable, very fertile. In fact, we have some parts of the state, where it is believed that if you just put your finger in the ground, and you can tolerate leaving it there for long enough, it will grow. I think we have the second-largest number of livestock in Nigeria—cows,

The other democracies need to see beyond the ordinary problems that Nigeria has, and see what sacrifices have been made, what peace has been established, what viable programs are coming up to develop the economy . . . to be able to do things for Nigeria and by Nigerians.

camels, goats. We have the famous red-skinned goats that give the Moroccan leather that people talk about. One of the areas we are heavily into is livestock. Leatherwork is one of our day-to-day activities: handbags, shoes, and the like. We have some tanneries associated with that, and a few individuals who do some milking, yogurt manufacture, and meat production.

The other industries that are still surviving include the Sokoto Furniture Factory, the various tanneries, the Zamfara textile mill. We are trying very hard to resuscitate the Gusau oil mill. About three weeks ago, we went to see it tested, in order to start production, because this is something that was left unused. We have gotten it some money, and it has started production—at least, a test run is going on.

It is a very viable industry, because this state is one of the largest producers of cotton and ground nuts, and those are the basic raw materials for that industry to produce both cotton linen, as well as various oils, vegetable oils or oil for cooking. A byproduct is animal feed, which we are working hard on. I believe that factory, when it is revived, will be able to increase the industrial and commercial activities of the state.

The other industry we are trying to resuscitate is the brick industry. We have large deposits of clay and limestone and the like. This industry had been working very hard, but packed up all of a sudden, because of the economic recession. That will go along with what we call the Wu Comat; it produces brick for construction. Connected with that is the one we want to establish at Talata Mafara, which is also a brick and ceramic company.

There is also the phosphate industry, because we have large deposits of phosphates. We believe this will help in our dream to produce fertilizer and water treatment chemicals. We have a large deposit of lime, and you will find that Sokoto cement is also produced here. We believe we have gypsum in commercial quantities; all we need is to start the construction of that, which will help in our production of cement and allied products.

In the agricultural sector, we have normal subsistence farming, as well as cash crops, including gum arabic. We have the fishery industry, which we are trying to develop in order to get enough fish within the state—and I am sure

we can supply fish to the whole country.

One of the other areas of basic commercial activity, or industrialization actually, is in day-to-day interaction within our market. We have to develop the market system, in order to see that we go back to the traditional way of trade and interaction, because the market of Sokoto state, being on the border, goes beyond the borders of the country; you can spread out to the other parts of West Africa, and good trade relations can go a long way to promote industrial development and commercial activities.

As to private individuals, there are very few that have developed their own industries, apart from the manufacture of some consumer items or furniture or other things for day-to-day living. But this is still in its infancy, and we are doing our best to promote large-scale industries that can use most of the basic raw materials that we have, especially as they are agro-allied. We have a few big flour companies, tomato companies, corned beef companies, and the like—agro-allied industries; we would also like to develop them. And textiles later, to become much bigger than what we have now, so that we can produce fabrics that can be sold to various organizations within the country and outside.

The land is there for development. I believe there is a lot of room for industrial development. We have carved out a lot of industrial areas, fully electrified and with the provision of water; labor is cheap, and the rent is cheap, so it is a very attractive place for industrial development. Generally there is calm and peace within the state, which are all elements of an excellent industrial and commercial basis for the state. We are hoping to cash in on these advantages, in order to make the state more viable.

EIR: Moving back to the political situation: Next month will be the conclusion of the Constitutional Conference that was given the task by General Abacha to come up with a Constitution. That is a big item in the news here, and also in the West. How do you assess the accomplishments of this conference, after nearly one year?

Mu'azu: I believe that one of the greatest things that will have happened to Nigeria is the Constitutional Conference. I could not believe that in my lifetime, I would see the type of development I saw: Nigerians sitting together, at a time

when the country was at the point that it looked like it was disintegrating, to rationalize, to analyze issues, to tell each other the truth, and to forget about where you come from, what religion you belong to. When that stabilization was achieved, some other issues came in, because people fall back to their little closets—"I belong to this section," "I belong to this religion," and so forth. It shows the Nigerian people at work, and there is nothing as good and as powerful as when people—experienced individuals, who have been governing a place—put their minds to solving Nigeria's problems.

I believe they have done excellent work; we have been able to work on the question of what *should be*, and the issue of who is dominating whom, who is holding economic power, who is holding political power. A lot of understanding was brought to bear, and people expressed their minds freely. I believe there is nothing that could be better. They came at a time when Nigeria was in need of people who are very committed, who are thoughtful, who have followers, and who have experience. And I can assure you that those people were an excellent selection, by their various communities, and they are the cream of Nigerian society, and they came to bare their demands. Regardless of what other individuals will have here and there. They were able to objectively look at the areas of contention within the Constitution, and make recommendations. They have debated it; now they will make the recommendation to the Armed Forces' Ruling Council, which will look at it, debate it, and pass it out, so that the country can go back to a viable democracy.

The Provisional Revolutionary Ruling Council will determine and see exactly that what we have done was quite good.

But what is important is the interaction, the ability for people to bare their minds, to come out with possible solutions to Nigeria's problems.

What is now left is the implementation of those viable programs, so that Nigeria can move forward and be able to build the much-needed democracy, so that we can go about doing our business in the manner that most people know.

EIR: Speaking of the question of democracy, you may know that the West has been escalating its attacks on Nigeria. There has now been, for several weeks, increased activity by this group TransAfrica, headed by Randall Robinson. Their basic demand is that the country must be turned over to democracy now; military rule must be ended now; until that is done, nothing else matters. How do you address those attacks?

Mu'azu: That is rather unfortunate, because what is important, is the ability to understand what the nation is all about, what constitutes the nation, what are the problems of that nation, what efforts have the leadership, before and now,

been making, in order to create a viable and ever-lasting democracy.

What assistance have the democracies of the world, the so-called democracies of the world, given, in order to ensure viable democracy? You will discover that democracies are of different shades and colors. The type of democracy in Britain is slightly different than the type of democracy in France, so also in Germany, so also in the United States, or anywhere else. Therefore, Nigeria has to systematically fashion out a more viable democracy for itself. What I believe the other parts of the world can do, is to see how best they can assist in institutionalizing democracy, getting a viable economy, and so on. The other democracies need to see beyond the ordinary problems that Nigeria has, and see what sacrifices have been made, what peace has been established, what viable programs are coming up in Nigeria to develop the economy, to develop political well-being, and to give our people education, take care of our hospitals, and basic communications, and to be able to do things for Nigeria and by Nigerians. I believe that is the basic issue, and that is where the outside world should be able to look at Nigeria and give it every possible assistance, in order to develop itself.

It doesn't matter what government you have, as long as the government has people who have moral backing, who articulate good programs that stabilize a nation, that give peace to a nation, and give it prosperity. I believe the current administration is doing that. Most importantly, the current administration is highly committed to democracy, and definitely this administration will not stay a day longer than necessary to ensure the democratic process.

For example, the major issue is to see that this conference that is going on, completes its work. As soon as it does, the government will look at the various issues at stake, and come out with a viable program that will eventually turn the country to democracy. Anybody who cares about democracy and human development in Nigeria, should do everything humanly possible to develop that democratic process and programs. No matter what, whatever you do, you must be sure that you have the moral courage and the moral attitude with which to rule a nation. Democracy is there all right, but then, with what morality is it being run? Even in the developed world, what obligation is being run with the democracy, to ensure that the whole world is at peace and free? And that democracy is viable, to reduce hunger, to reduce suffering, to reduce terrorism, in whatever form it comes? What has democracy done to do that, and what has it done to escalate it?

In this particular administration, if Nigerians are ready tomorrow to come out with a viable political program, this administration, this military government, will leave the scene tomorrow, and leave Nigeria to continue its processes of development of the nation.