

Nigerian dignitaries tour U.S., refute lies of British-backed destabilizers

by Lawrence K. Freeman

A delegation of prominent Nigerians, including several members of the Nigerian Constitutional Conference (NCC), spent two weeks in the United States in October at the invitation of the Schiller Institute, telling the true history of Nigeria's problems and its plans over the next three years to achieve a stable elected government. The delegation had meetings with government officials, several congressional offices, engaged in discussion with representatives of the African-American media, held a press conference in Washington, D.C., and spoke at public forums in Houston, Texas and Cheverly, Maryland. The result of all these activities, was that for the first time, the lies circulated by the western press were countered with the truth about Nigeria.

The delegation was led by Chief Tony Anenih, a senior political leader from Nigeria's southwest, a lifetime vice chairman of the Benin Chamber of Commerce and Industry, and also a member of the NCC. His role as former chairman of the Social Democratic Party (SDP), the party of Chief M.K.O. Abiola, who claims to have won the June 12, 1993 election, placed Chief Anenih in a unique position to know the details of what really happened, leading up to the annulment of that election and the course of events leading to Gen. Sani Abacha's taking control of the government on Nov. 17, 1993.

Chief Anenih was accompanied by a colleague from the NCC, Baba Adi, a lawyer from Lagos, and Tony Idigo, a public relations consultant. They were joined at the end of their visit by another group, led by Chief Odumegwu Ojukwu, former Head of State for the breakaway republic of Biafra (1967-70). Accompanying Chief Ojukwu was Sen. Sharif Ali, a delegate of the NCC; Adebayo Oladimeji, president of the Nigerian Patriots U.K.; and Chief Chekwes Okorie, a respected Ibo leader.

The very fact that this delegation was able to come to the United States and present first-hand reports on events in their country is a victory for Nigeria and a defeat for British Minister of Overseas Development Lynda Chalker, who is coordinating the destabilization against this most important strategic West African nation.

Chief Abiola's treachery

In his press conference, in a cable television interview, in discussions with government leaders, and in front of audi-

ences of hundreds of Nigerians and Americans, Chief Anenih detailed the history of the troubles that have plagued Nigeria since the election of 1993. Many of those who listened to Chief Anenih were forced to acknowledge that this was the first time they were hearing this information. (For a detailed rundown of what happened, see interview, p. 46.)

Chief Anenih reported that nothing would have made him happier, as chairman of the SDP, than for his candidate, Abiola, to have won the Presidential elections on June 12, 1993. But a court order cancelled the election before it ever took place, and the resulting confusion was used by then-Head of State Gen. Ibrahim Babangida to annul the election two weeks later. It was clear to all political observers that Babangida was scheming to prolong his long-overdue retirement. Finally, the two parties forced Babangida to appoint Chief Shonekan as head of an Interim National Government. Abiola led a campaign to bring down the Shonekan government, and afterwards, without consultation with his party or Chief Anenih, lobbied for General Abacha to rescue the country by becoming the new Head of State. Abiola secretly had hoped that Abacha would make him President. Only after visiting the United States, Great Britain, and attending the inauguration of President Nelson Mandela in South Africa in April 1994, did Abiola get the idea of declaring himself President. Chief Anenih told his audiences that he advised Abiola against this, but Abiola foolishly created his own coat of arms and drove through Lagos declaring himself the new Head of State of Nigeria, which resulted in his arrest on charges of sedition.

This history completely undermines any notion that Abiola was or is leading a democratic movement. Despite ugly attacks against Chief Anenih at a public forum in Houston on Oct. 14, where opposition groups called him a "liar" and a "paid stooge" for Abacha, Chief Anenih held his ground, and refused to let his detractors run away from the truth about Abiola's treachery.

The Nigerian Constitutional Conference

Baba Adi, one of four delegates to the NCC who comprised the delegation, described the year-long deliberations of the constitutional conference, which opposition forces have derided as a "front" for General Abacha's military government, "a group of hand-picked old boys" who accom-

plished nothing. General Abacha adopted the recommendations of the NCC and added some provisions of his own, which he outlined in his Oct. 1 speech to the nation on the three-year transition program (see *EIR*, Oct. 13, p. 72).

Adi highlighted some of the unique features of the new Constitution, such as the rotating Presidency, an attempt to overcome regional and "ethnic" tensions. The six national leadership positions—President, vice president, prime minister, deputy prime minister, president of the Senate, and speaker of the House—will rotate among six zones, three in the north and three in the south. This is to ensure that each of the six sectors, over a 30-year period, will be able to elect a person to each of the top national positions. He reported that another important innovation is to stipulate that 13% of revenues derived from any geographical area will be reinvested in that area. This effectively deals with the long-simmering Ogoni separatist problem.

All of the speakers made clear that they oppose military rule; but they recognize that a dialogue with the ruling government is necessary to provide for a transition to civilian rule. This point was powerfully made by Chief Anenih, who was incarcerated for 18 months by an earlier military government, and by Chief Ojukwu, who was exiled and jailed after his failed effort to create a separate Ibo state, in the Biafran war.

Tumultuous forum in Maryland

On Oct. 21, the final day of activity by the combined Nigerian delegation, a brawl broke out during a three-and-a-half-hour public forum organized by the Schiller Institute in Cheverly, Maryland entitled, "The Truth About Nigeria." There was a huge turnout to the meeting by the London-sponsored anti-Nigerian groups, including the National Democratic Coalition (Nadeco), the Nigerian Democratic Movement (NDM), and Chief Abiola's personal paid agent in the United States Randall E. Echols. It was evident the night before the forum that those trying to destabilize Nigeria were upset that the meeting was taking place, when someone identifying himself as from Nadeco called the Schiller Institute office in Baltimore and accused this author of having been paid \$5 million by the Abacha government. Despite multiple disruptions by the rowdy opposition forces and the thug-like behavior of Abiola's boy Randy Echols, the crowd of 150 heard the truth from Chief Anenih, Chief Ojukwu, Baba Adi, Sen. Sharif Ali, and Adebayo Oladimeji.

Chief Ojukwu challenged the agitated audience: What were they going to do about the Abacha military government, get tanks and go to war? Ojukwu said, "I will do everything possible, while I live, to ensure that there will be no more bloodshed in Nigeria." In answer to a question from Nadeco on the viability of the NCC, he replied that "this was different from other conferences. . . . It was completely free" and far from being a useless constitutional conference,

it had accomplished revolutionary results for Nigeria's future.

At the end of the tumultuous event, Prof. Bolaji Aluko, president of the Nigerian Democratic Movement, told the crowd that although he had met with Lyndon LaRouche, "the International Monetary Fund is not our problem. . . . We hope that you [the LaRouche movement] stay as far away from our country as you can," until we get our freedom.

Uwe Friesecke of the Schiller Institute responded: "This is the most cynical, most disgusting statement of an African vis-à-vis the African continent. I challenge you to go back to Nigeria—to look into the eyes of those children that don't get medical care because of the IMF. To go to Somalia and find those mothers whose children died because of the IMF. The IMF has committed conscious genocide."

Nigeria's future in transition

In his Oct. 1 national television address, General Abacha outlined a 36-month transition program to return the country to democratic rule. The most crucial task during this period is to bring together a qualified national leadership, to ensure the integrity of Nigeria as a sovereign nation, which will serve as a cornerstone for progress for the whole African continent. A new "national party" leadership is required to ensure the unity of the country, and to uplift the population spiritually, culturally, and economically.

Nigeria's future requires a leadership immune to ethnic, regional, and tribal manipulations. Nigeria was created by the British, taking advantage of ethnic and regional divisions. Until the false belief structures that say one is "a good Ibo man" or "a good Yoruba man" or "a good Hausa man" are transcended, by the notion that all men are equal and good, because we are all created in the image of the Creator, then not only will Nigeria never be at peace, but the soil will always be fertile for civil wars and destabilizations.

It is time for Nigerians to finally cast off the yoke of over a century of colonial domination by the British oligarchy. It is necessary to end Nigeria's subservient relationship to Great Britain. The fear of attacking the British by name, and identifying their omnipresent manipulation of Nigeria, will guarantee a dark future.

Any strict adherence to IMF prescriptions should be discontinued. The IMF Structural Adjustment Programs implemented by the Babangida regime have severely weakened the country and have created horrible living conditions for the overwhelming majority of the 100 million-plus Nigerians. Democracy is impossible, as long as millions of families live in poor housing, do not have adequate health care, and have no means of support except to join the ranks of the degraded and wasteful "informal economy." Without economic development, democracy is a cruel joke, and without discontinuing the IMF's free-trade policy, there will be no economic growth in Nigeria.