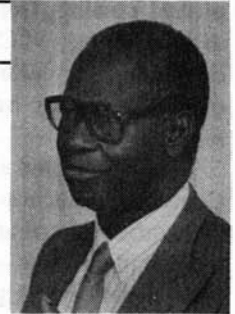

Interview: Chief Tony Anenih



Nigeria needs a chance for transition program to succeed

Chief Anenih is a member of the Nigerian Constitutional Conference, former chairman of the Social Democratic Party, and lifetime vice chairman of the Benin Chamber of Commerce and Industry. He was interviewed on Oct. 20 by Lawrence Freeman, during a visit to the United States.

EIR: One big issue that has been discussed in the western press, and by various opposition groups in Nigeria, concerns the election of Chief M.K. Abiola in June 1993, and what became known as the June 12 Movement, which followed that. This has been an issue for a couple of years, which people have pointed to, to show that the current government is a dictatorial, anti-democratic government. You were the chairman of the Social Democratic Party, and Chief Abiola ran for President on your party platform. Could you tell us the history of this June 12 Movement, and what happened with Chief Abiola, and how that affects the current situation in Nigeria?

Anenih: What led us to the present political crisis, so to speak, is well known to every Nigerian, and indeed to most foreign countries. In 1991, there was an attempt to hold Presidential elections. Some Presidential candidates were nominated by their parties. Before the election was to be held, the then-President, General Babangida, cancelled the primaries, and went from there to dissolve the parties, and name caretaker committees to run these parties. The committees were charged with the responsibility of 1) putting in place the party executives at all levels, and 2) nominating fresh Presidential candidates, for future Presidential elections. It was in this process, that I was elected as the national chairman of the Social Democratic Party (SDP), and in the same process, Chief M.K. Abiola became the Presidential candidate. I was elected chairman on about April 14, 1993. Chief Abiola was elected a week or two before that.

EIR: So, Abiola was picked as the candidate of your party before you were elected chairman?

Anenih: Yes. The convention that elected Abiola was also to elect the national chairman and members of the national executive.

The election of Abiola was done first. My election was

postponed for another week or so, because of logistics problems.

EIR: Was there actually a party in place, when Abiola was picked as President, or was it still under the caretaker committee?

Anenih: On the national level, the party was under the caretaker committee, but at the local and state government level, the parties had been established. The last lap was to establish the national executive of the party.

When eventually I was elected as national chairman of the party, we went all-out to campaign for votes. Chief Abiola was now the flag-bearer, the Presidential candidate, with Amb. Baba Gana Kingibe as the vice presidential running mate. One thing that shielded Abiola was that Nigerians needed a change. Chief Abiola is a Muslim, and he also chose a Muslim as his running mate. Nigerian politicians don't bother about whether you are a Muslim or a Christian. All they wanted was a change. And Abiola and the party got support during the June 12 elections. The election results came in slowly, because of the river areas, and the poor communication system.

By June 23, 1993, then-Head of State General Babangida gave a broadcast and cancelled the elections. Before the elections had been held, the Association for a Better Nigeria, headed by one Chief Arthur Nzeribe, who is a liberal man, went to the federal High Court in Abuja and got a judgment stopping the elections, because he had alleged irregularities. By the time we were holding the June 12 election, the court judgment was still in place. And when, on June 23, General Babangida annulled the elections, a vacuum had been created. The politicians were asked to go back and prepare for fresh elections, with new candidates, this time no longer Abiola, because the military said that they did not want Abiola as their commander in chief of the Armed Forces, for reasons known to the military. The two political parties resisted, and rejected that option of going for fresh elections.

It was a result of this rejection, that the military decided that the only way out was to put in place an interim government. The political parties had a series of joint meetings, consultations with religious leaders, labor leaders, communi-

ty leaders, and we eventually put in place an Interim National Government (ING), but with the proviso that it must be headed by a civilian. It was then, that Chief Shonekan was appointed as the Head of State and commander in chief of the Armed Forces of Nigeria, to head up the Interim National Government.

When this was done, Chief Abiola was in London. He had escaped, according to him, because he feared for his life. But immediately, Chief Shonekan was sworn in, and Chief Abiola came back to Nigeria and mounted a vicious campaign against the Interim National Government, calling on the military to intervene and take over. He went on the radio, the television, the pages of newspapers, editorials, there was campaigning, addressing rallies from state to state, when on Nov. 17, 1993, because of the tension which this campaign had created—people were now afraid, they were moving from their states of residence to their states of origin, they were driving school-children from the schools—Abacha came and salvaged the situation. When this happened, he thought that if Abacha took over, he would, in turn, hand over [power] to him, Chief Abiola. But that didn't happen. He waited for a few months, but when Abacha didn't hand over power to him, he mounted another campaign. Some of his colleagues, who had helped him to campaign for military intervention, now went overseas and shamelessly affiliated themselves with a pro-democracy group, known as Nadeco [National Democratic Coalition]. They are the same people who had campaigned for the military to come in and take over from Chief Shonekan.

During this process, the swearing-in ceremony of President [Nelson] Mandela was coming near, and Chief Abiola went to South Africa to witness the swearing-in ceremony. It was there that he saw a black man being sworn in as the Head of State, and he felt, "Well, why not me?" So he came back to Nigeria, and said he was going to declare himself the President of the country.

Chief Abiola knew that this was going to be an offense against the law of the land, a treasonable felony. People advised him—I personally advised him. I went as far as to advertise in the newspapers, telling him not to carry out his intended action, because I knew he was going to commit an offense for which he might be arrested. He had no force of law; he had no police; he had no military that would back him for his action. But he swept all the advice overboard, and went and declared himself the President of the country. He made out the government coat of arms, which he put on his car, when he drove from the part of Lagos where he had declared himself.

EIR: He made up his own coat of arms, different from the Nigerian coat of arms?

Anenih: Yes. In the same shape, in the same form. And he printed a letterhead: commander in chief. In the process, he was arrested by the police, for committing an offense under the code of Nigeria. And that was why he was dragged to

court. Not to a military court, but to a civil court. And while he was there, because of the peculiar nature of the situation, the courts decided to grant him bail, although the offense he committed is not aailable offense. But Abiola again got advice from his so-called advisers, that he should not sign any bail bond, that he should appear when the case comes up in court. He rejected the bail that was granted. That is why he is still there today.

EIR: How long was Abiola a member of your party, the Social Democratic Party, before he became the Presidential candidate?

Anenih: Chief Abiola joined the party about a month before he publicly showed interest as an SDP Presidential aspirant. He joined other people, like Amb. Baba Gana Kingibe. They were all in the race. There was a representative from each of the 30 states. It was at the convention, on the first ballot, that all of us were eliminated, and the first three had to go for a second ballot. It was then that Chief Abiola emerged as the winner. Amb. Baba Gana Kingibe came in second, and that is why he chose him as his vice presidential running mate.

EIR: Did you find it irregular, that the Presidential and the vice presidential candidate were picked before the actual national party was constituted under your leadership, a week or two later?

Anenih: The convention would have elected the national executive at the same time, but it was postponed for a week or two because of logistical problems. What that showed, was that Chief Abiola was elected as a Presidential candidate for a party that did not exist at the center, until the national executive was put in place two weeks after.

EIR: Some people have said that because Babangida did not want to leave office, he was scheming from the beginning, to manipulate the NRC candidate, and to manipulate the SDP candidate, Abiola, so that there would not be an actual, concluded election, and he could remain in power.

Anenih: I would say, without fear of contradiction, that it was very obvious that General Babangida did not want to hand over power.

EIR: Do you think that Abiola and the NRC candidate, Bashir Tofa, knew this in advance?

Anenih: It is a possibility. Today, although Chief Abiola and the party have suffered reverses as a result of the annulment, Chief Abiola is still one of General Babangida's closest friends. They still exchange notes and letters.

EIR: Did Abiola remain a close friend of Babangida throughout the whole process?

Anenih: I can say that for sure.

EIR: You said that Abiola campaigned vigorously for Gen-

I want to say this again, that the sanctions that people like Professor Akinyemi and all those are asking for, will only cause more prolonged military rule, because there is no way in the world that, during a crisis, an enduring democracy can be put in place.

eral Abacha to come in and assume control of the country.

Anenih: Yes. The valid documents are here.

EIR: When Abiola was campaigning for Abacha to come in and take control of the country, did Abiola convey to you or other people that he expected Abacha to hand over the country to him, as the elected President, from June 12?

Anenih: I only heard of this when Abiola was addressing a rally in one of the state capitals. He was not in touch with the party, as far as this new development was concerned. The party did not know that he had negotiated with the military to come and take over, until he made it public.

EIR: So he made it public, that he was trying to negotiate with General Abacha to become President, but he never discussed this with you, the chairman of the party, who helped get him elected?

Anenih: He never did.

EIR: What were Abiola's motivations in bringing Abacha into the government, and then to try to get the Abacha government to hand over power to him?

Anenih: I think he took advantage of his relationship with the military. All along, he has been accused of having been associated with previous coups. He was very friendly with the military, and he thought that because of that friendship, the military would consider him, now that Babangida was no longer there, to become President of the country. But I think he miscalculated.

EIR: Most people are not aware that Abiola was connected to previous coups, and close to all the military leaders.

Anenih: I say that it is a *possibility*. He had been associated. If you look at the interview he conducted after Abacha had taken over, he admitted discussing with Abacha and inviting him to come and take over the reins of government. And not only that: Chief Abiola was one of the first leading politicians to go and congratulate General Abacha after he took over. He did not stop there; he submitted a list of people whom General Abacha should appoint as ministers, including his vice presidential running mate, who is still a minister today. He didn't consult with the party. The party was not consulted.

EIR: After the Interim Government under Chief Shonekan

collapsed, and Abacha was brought in, did Abiola say, "But I was elected President on June 12?" Or did he basically say, "I am willing to work with the Abacha government"?

Anenih: As I said, it was when Abacha took over, and they did not hand over power to him as he expected, that he declared himself the President of the country.

EIR: And this was done without any backing from the party?

Anenih: No. Just alone, with a few of his mischievous advisers.

EIR: As chairman of the party, how did you respond when he declared himself President?

Anenih: Before he declared himself President, I heard that he was going to do so, and I advised him. But he didn't take my advice. He didn't contact me about it, but I *heard* he was going to do so. And because he was my candidate, I had a duty to advise him, so I put it in the papers that I was advising him not to carry out his intended action. But he swept aside my advice and went ahead and declared himself the President of the country.

EIR: Given that you were the chairman of the party, and that people claim that Abiola won the election on June 12, how did you feel, when your candidate was not made President?

Anenih: I was very disappointed. And that was why, initially, we refused to accept any directive from the government to go for fresh elections. Because there was nothing wrong with the first elections.

EIR: You felt the first elections were fair?

Anenih: Very fair and peaceful. But as I said, it was the military that said they would not accept Chief Abiola as their commander in chief.

EIR: What made you realize that Abiola was not going to be President, and that you had to work with the current government for some kind of peaceful process?

Anenih: We thought that if we removed General Babangida from office, there was the possibility of actualizing the June 12 election, by discussing with the other parties, to find a way to bring Abiola back. Abiola was fully briefed on these negotiations that the SDP was having with the other parties.

On some occasions, he acknowledged my efforts, thanking me for what I was doing, because I was briefing him from time to time. But in the process, somebody else advised him that instead of waiting for the party to put in place a formation that would actualize June 12, it was quicker for him to call in the Army, which would hand over power to him tomorrow. So he abandoned all our efforts, all our plans to actualize June 12. I have those letters. I was still working for the possibility that Chief Abiola would become the President.

EIR: And he was going behind your back—

Aneih: To negotiate with the military, to come and take over. Because it would be quicker for the military to take over today, and hand over power to him tomorrow. But he miscalculated.

EIR: There is a great deal of misinformation, and some may call it deliberate disinformation, that comes from the National Democratic Coalition, Nadeco, that says that they are the ones fighting for democracy, they are the ones fighting for people's rights in Nigeria. Could you tell us something about Nadeco?

Aneih: Nadeco is composed of these elements, who joined Chief Abiola to call in the military: people like Professor Akinyemi, who was in Nadeco in London. He was one of those who advertised for the military to come and take over from Shonekan. His advertisement, which I will show you here—"Abacha, Time to Act"—called on General Abacha by name, to come and take over from a government that was headed by a civilian. For selfish reasons: He was expecting to be made a minister. But when Abiola submitted his list of ministers, he was dropped. All he did was to run to London, and start campaigning for sanctions, that Abacha must go. These are the Nadeco rascals. Nadeco is composed of people who were not party members; they were not registered voters. These are fiction writers! Like Professor Soyinka, another Nadeco man in exile in London.

EIR: Was it Nadeco, therefore, which backed the military coming to power, but which now operates out of London against the government that they helped bring in?

Aneih: Yes. They called in the military, but they are now working against the military, just as they worked against the Interim National Government. Until they occupy positions, they will never be satisfied.

EIR: Who do you think is behind Nadeco, that is pushing them in this direction?

Aneih: One is surprised how they are able to sustain themselves. I have no evidence of the source of their funds, but until Abiola was detained, he was supplying funds for these campaigns, because he is a very wealthy man. But now that Abiola is in detention, I am told by those that are close to him, that many a time he said, "Oh, these people are draining

my pockets"—the Nadeco people. He talks a lot. But whether the process of funding is still there, I don't know. Or whether there are foreign bodies that want to see Nigeria collapse, that are helping them, I don't know.

EIR: The other group that is very active in the United States is TransAfrica, which is headed up by Randall Robinson. They have been holding rallies outside the Nigerian embassy, and getting themselves arrested and released five minutes later. They are saying that Nigeria is violating people's human rights, that General Abacha is a bloody dictator, and they are trying to pressure President Clinton to issue harsh oil sanctions against Nigeria. How do you view TransAfrica? Whose interests are they operating in?

Aneih: Robinson is an actor. He wants his name to be heard all the time; even when people don't take notice of him, he deliberately commits an offense, so that it will be in the news. There is no doubt that TransAfrica is basing its vicious campaign against Nigeria on false premises. I can recognize him as one of the Nadeco officers. He is an American, but definitely he is doing worse things than the Nadeco people. Yesterday, when Amnesty International released some reports, he was there. He was there to talk about Nigeria. He would not have been there, if he were not supported by organizations like the IMF [International Monetary Fund] and the rest. He's doing this because he wants the popularity. He continues to strive in the crisis. We want to solve our problems in Nigeria, without external interference.

EIR: You say there should be no external interference, but isn't it true that Akinyemi, who heads up Nadeco, has met frequently with Baroness Lynda Chalker of the British Ministry of Overseas Development? This has been reported in almost all the western press. This would indicate that he is working deliberately, with forces outside of Nigeria.

Aneih: Yes. That is his own method. He has left Nigeria, having lost, and has gone back to London, to create a situation that does not exist in Nigeria. As I said, he was doing that purely for selfish reasons. If he had been appointed minister, Professor Akinyemi or Prof. Wole Soyinka would have been among those now asking General Abacha to stay for another ten years! As they did, when they called him in. But because they lost out, they changed their tune, and starting asking for Abacha to be kicked out.

I want to say this again, that the sanctions that people like Professor Akinyemi and all those are asking for, will only cause more prolonged military rule, because there is no way in the world that, during a crisis, an enduring democracy can be put in place.

EIR: Since you have been in the United States for two weeks, you have heard the accusation that people in Nigeria are being detained illegally, that their rights are not being

respected. Is this true? How widespread is this?

Anenih: As far as I know, there are no political detainees in Nigeria. There is nobody behind bars today, who has not deliberately committed a criminal offense, against the criminal law of the land. That is the truth.

I want to say also, that people talk about freedom of the press. I think that Nigeria has the greatest press freedom. When you see what some papers print about individuals, about the Head of State, you weep for Nigeria. They do it shamelessly! There was a time that the government proscribed some newspapers. But at the first of this month, in the Head of State's speech, they were allowed to come back. I don't think anything can be freer than that.

EIR: Let's talk about the future of Nigeria. You were a member of the Nigerian Constitutional Conference, which met from June 1994 to June 1995. You wrote a Constitution. You submitted recommendations to General Abacha and the Provisional Ruling Council. General Abacha made a speech on Oct. 1, on the 35th anniversary of Nigerian independence, outlining a three-year transition to stability in government. How do you view General Abacha's speech, and how do you view the future of Nigeria?

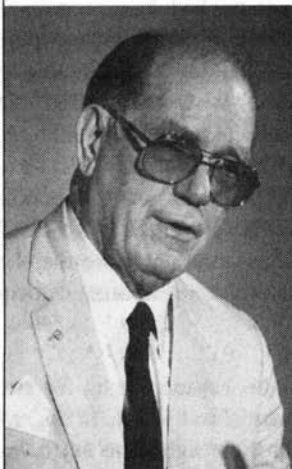
Anenih: When General Abacha made that speech, I congratulated him for his magnanimity, because the government accepted 90% of the recommendations of the Constitutional

Conference. They even improved on the idea of a rotational Presidency, by dividing the country into six zones, such that every election year, a different zone would present the President, another zone the prime minister, another zone the vice president, another zone the deputy prime minister, the fifth zone the president of the Senate, and the sixth zone, the speaker of the House of Representatives. This has solved the problem of marginalization, and stopped the system of "winner take all." Now that we are going to run a multi-party system, the implication is that if your party has 10% of the total votes cast, your party is entitled to a certain number of ministers on the Federal Executive Council. The same thing goes for the states, and indeed the local government area. I think this is very reassuring, and we are looking forward to more political activity.

EIR: Do you think this program will be carried out, and that in 1998, the military will leave and there will be Presidential elections?

Anenih: From what I have seen of General Abacha, since he took over two years ago, he has kept all his promises. In his maiden speech, he talked about the Constitutional Conference, which he put in place. In his maiden speech, he said that the military would not perpetuate itself in office, and, depending upon the recommendations of the Constitutional Conference, the military would give a date for its

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disengagement. That is what he has done. I have no reason whatsoever to believe that he will change his habits.

EIR: Obviously, the next three years will be critical, in the move toward a stable, democratic country. What do you consider the possible pitfalls?

Anenih: It is not going to be easy. But because I have confidence in the transition program, because it is exactly the issues that we discussed at the Constitutional Conference that are being put in place now, the program is going to take care of state creation, of local government creation. It is going to create a Constitutional Court, which has never been in place before. It is going to build a Federal Character Commission, which will make sure that anything that is done has a federal character. Now there is also going to be a situation where the power of the federal government is reduced, and distributed to the states and the local government councils. That is why I feel strongly that I have to take part in politics, toward achieving a solution. I am satisfied with the program laid out for the transition.

EIR: You are a well-known political leader. What will you be doing in this three-year transition process?

Anenih: I would like to be one of the leaders of a political party that believes in justice, in forming a government of the people, by the people, for the people. Now that the elections are staggered—from the local government, to the state elections, to the National Assembly elections, to the Presidential elections—I am sure that any mistake, any logistical mistake that is made in one election, will be corrected in the second election. It would have been more dangerous, and very unsafe, to lump the elections together, because if one thing goes wrong with one, it will affect all. Now that it is staggered, I have hope that the future will be better than the past.

EIR: President Clinton has resisted pressures from other countries, including Great Britain, to put more pressure on Nigeria. If you had the opportunity, hypothetically, to give advice to President Clinton, what would you recommend as the proper relationship of the United States toward Nigeria, in the current transitional period?

Anenih: President Clinton is a politician, and he is playing it very safe. There are Americans who want sanctions to be imposed on Nigeria today; there are some who would want to sit on the fence and watch. I would make an appeal, that he hear both sides of the story, and help Nigeria to put in place an enabling environment, so that the transitional program can succeed. Because if you impose more sanctions, there will be more tension in the country than we have now, and that is not a step toward democratization. So if Clinton wants a democracy in Nigeria, he should help the Nigerian government to put in place a peaceful transition program.

'Alternate U.N.' promotes ethnicity

by Mark Burdman

The Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization (UNPO), based in The Hague, Netherlands, has been identified by key figures in the "ethnicity" movement as an international command center for separatist and secessionist movements.

The group was founded in 1991, on the basis of an initiative by Lodi Gyari, foreign minister of the Dalai Lama's Tibetan exile government. Gyari visited the Soviet Union in 1989, and looked up a fellow Buddhist, Far Eastern history professor Linnart Maell, himself from Estonia. They resolved to form an organization that, in Maell's words, would "work for small peoples."

The "Members List," as of February 1995, includes: Abkhazia, Aboriginals of Australia, Acheh/Sumatra, Albanians in Macedonia, Assyria, Batwa (Rwanda), Bougainville, Chechen Republic Ichkeria, Chittagong Hill Tracts, Circassians, Cordillera (Philippines), Chameria, Chuvash, Crimea (Crimean Tatars), East Timor, East Turkestan, Gagauzia, Greek Minority in Albania, Hungarian Minority in Romania, Inkeri, Ingushetia, Iraqi Turkoman, Kalahui Hawaii, Karenni State, Komi, Kosova, Kurdistan (Iraq), Lakota Nation, Maohi People of French Polynesia, Mapuche, Mari, Nagaland, Ogoni (Nigeria), Sanjak, Scania, Republic of South Moluccas, Taiwan, Tatarstan, Tibet, Udmurt, West Papua, Sakha Republic (Yakutia), and Zanzibar.

The UNPO is sometimes referred to as "the alternative United Nations."

The secretary general of UNPO is Michael van Walt, the son of Dutch diplomats, who had previously been a Washington lawyer and general counsel to the Dalai Lama, and had represented Tibet's case before the U.N. Human Rights Commission. Until his recent resignation (but not out of disagreement with the group's activities and aims), van Walt had been on the board of the Washington-based Institute for American Democracy. Also on the board are Joel McCleary, former treasurer of the Democratic National committee and staff member of the White House in 1978-80, and Robert Thurman, professor of Buddhist Studies and chairman of the Religion Department at Columbia University. The institute's development coordinator is Elsie Walker, a first cousin of former President George Bush. The institute's points of concentration have been Tibet, Mongolia, Burma, and China. It sponsored a 1993 conference on "The Allied Peoples of Turkestan, Mongolia, and Tibet," at which maps were de-