

tering Nigerians for the elections, and so far has registered 57 million, almost 55% of the total population. Participation in the March 1997 local government elections varied from 52% to 60% of registered voters. (Both figures are higher than voter turnout in U.S. elections.) Reports received by *EIR* indicate that the Dec. 6, 1997 elections for State Assembly were successful.

The final year of elections

What remains is the final year of elections. The revised 1998 timetable for the last phase of the transition process includes: February, party primaries for nomination of candidates for the National Assembly; March, filing of nominating papers for the National Assembly elections; April 25, National Assembly elections; June, party primaries, and filing of nominating papers for state governors and Presidential elections; Aug. 1, state governors and Presidential elections; Sept. 21, swearing-in of elected state governors, and inauguration of State House of Assembly; Oct. 1, swearing-in of President, and inauguration of the National Assembly.

Democracy by itself does not solve the main problems facing Nigeria, which Justice Nasir correctly says are economic development and education—issues addressed below (p. 62), in a speech by Sam Aluko, professor of economics and chairman of the National Economic Intelligence Committee. However, Justice Nasir ridicules the negativity by the West toward Nigeria: “I always tell the Nigerian press, like I’m telling these people of weaker minds: Don’t think negative. . . . We are doing this in the interest of our nation.”

Interview: Justice Mamman Nasir

‘We hope the United States will be fair’

Justice Mamman Nasir is chairman of Nigeria’s Transition Implementation Committee. He was interviewed by Lawrence Freeman, on Oct. 28, 1997.

EIR: Justice Nasir, you now are chairman of the Transition Implementation Committee, which is overseeing the transition to a democracy and elections in Nigeria. Could you tell us what your responsibilities are?

Nasir: The whole idea of the Transition Implementation Committee is to see that the government is implementing the decisions of the Constitutional Conference. Because the Constitutional Conference recommended so many things to

do in respect to economy, social services, and politics. And as far as we have been able to follow, a lot has been achieved.

EIR: Specifically, what has been achieved in the first two years of the transition process? What has been accomplished in Nigeria?

Nasir: On the political scene, we have held two elections, and we have prepared the ground for the next set of elections: Houses of Assembly, National Assembly, and, ultimately, the Presidential and the governorship election.

In the economic field, we have succeeded in arresting the downflow of our economy. For example, we have started stabilizing the naira [Nigeria’s currency]. And, we have started getting some of our businesses back. We have tried to arrest the downfall and substandard aspects of the economy. For example, in showing the nation that whoever decides to be dishonest, government will pursue that dishonesty and recoup the property lost or stolen; it does not matter whose property it is, it will go back to the correct owner. Like the banking sector: The money being recovered is not government money; it is Nigeria’s money; it is Nigeria’s economy. So, we are doing that, absolutely successfully. We have succeeded! You must have been told this by Finance, that our budgeting system has improved; the business community is now a bit happier, in fact much happier, with what has so far been achieved.

In the social sector, I was telling you about the railways, the hospitals, and so on.

EIR: There is 11 months left until the transition to a civilian President taking over in Nigeria. What do you think is going to happen, to guarantee the success of this transition?

Nasir: The first thing one should look at, is, from a state where the nation would have gone to pieces, we are now at a state where the nation is going up, with stability. And, as far as we have been able to trace, this stability will continue, and there is *no reason whatsoever* to believe otherwise. So, the next—in fact, under 11 months—because after August everything is known. By the first week of August, we hope everybody will know every governor, and the President. So, within that period, the economy, the other aspects of transition, would continue. The political one would come to fruition by the end of August.

EIR: When are the Presidential elections?

Nasir: Aug. 1, 1998.

EIR: Then when does the Presidency take over?

Nasir: Oct. 1.

EIR: Now, many people in the West are dismissing these elections, saying that they are a subterfuge; they are not real; this is Nigerians buying time. As head of the Transition Committee, what can you tell the naysayers? What can you tell

them that assures them that this process is going to be completed?

Nasir: I always tell the Nigerian press, like I'm telling these people with weaker minds: Don't think negative. We are doing this in the interest of our nation. We believe it's right, in the interest of this nation. We believe we are doing the correct thing. We see no reason whatever why we should deviate, and think of something else. The head of state himself, Gen. Sani Abacha, has said many times, that government will hand over on Oct. 1, 1998. I and my colleagues here of the committee have not seen any iota of truth in any allegation that the government has no intention of concluding the transition program, as arranged.

EIR: Now, there are five parties that have registered, through this process in Nigeria. Do you expect that each of the parties will have its own candidate, that there will be five Presidential candidates for the election?

Nasir: Well, it is difficult for me to say, but they are entitled, as a right, to field a candidate in each party. There is nothing that says that they should not. So far, they have fielded candidates in most of the local government [races]. But some of the parties did not field anybody. And in politics, take for example in Britain, you find the Liberal Democrats—I think that is what they are called—are not contesting all the seats, like the Conservatives or Labour. So here in Nigeria, if they decide to field candidates for the Presidency, it is their absolute right. Equally, they could field candidates for each governorship office. But, if they decide not to do so, it is, again, within their right.

But personally, I'll encourage them to do this; it is part of democracy. Nobody should inhibit anybody, and, so far, government is encouraging all the parties to have the sense that they are national, because that is the basis upon which they were registered as political parties.

EIR: Do you expect there will be many candidates for the Presidential election?

Nasir: At the moment, I can only work on the known. They are entitled to field a candidate. So, you start by presuming that they can exercise their right. Whether they do it or not, honestly, it would be too speculative to say.

EIR: I guess this is a loaded question, but it's a question that is asked all the time in the West; it's asked all over Washington: Is General Abacha using this process so that he can become civilian President of Nigeria, after leaving his post, on Oct. 1, 1998, as Commander-in-Chief?

Nasir: Many people have asked me this question. I said: When the time comes for the parties to nominate Presidential candidates, that is the only time that anyone can be sure who is, and who is not, a Presidential candidate. And, I have not myself discussed with General Abacha whether he'll contest the election. To me, it was irrelevant.



Justice Mamman Nasir, chairman of the Transition Implementation Committee: The United States cherishes democracy, which means building a government by the people and of the people. "They should give other people encouragement to do it themselves; they should not impose what has been achieved in the United States over the last 200 years."

EIR: You brought up earlier, that democracy is not just a matter of elections. What ideas do you think are embodied in a true democracy for Nigeria?

Nasir: Our main problem is our development. You see, in a developing nation, certain things must happen, not in the same way as would happen in developed countries. Take the United Kingdom, for example, or the United States. If somebody is out of work, government would feed him. No developing country, as far as I know, in the world, is doing that. Not even the largest democracy, India.

So, as far as we are concerned, our main worry is to build our people to a stable standard, so that they can go to the market and buy; they are free to go to court; they are free to exercise their rights; they are free to participate in anything national; they are free to live anywhere they like in Nigeria; and they have equal opportunity to hold any public office. The result would depend on whoever the people wish should hold any particular post.

EIR: What kind of measures do you see the government taking—again, outside the elections—in terms of economic policy, that will raise the standard of living of Nigerians over the years ahead, as the democratic process moves forward?

Nasir: One is that government hinges a lot of weight on build-

ing the rural community. Because over 75% of the population lives in the rural areas, as farmers. And because of that, we cannot succeed in Nigeria until we build the rural community.

You build the basic education. We are making it a fundamental right that at least everybody should go to school. And, we are making it part of the directed principles of state policy that Nigerians should have the opportunity to reach even the universities, and all tertiary institutions.

These are some of the factors which, we believe, if you built them, you would have a stronger and more stable democracy. While also encouraging education of the people, of the electorate, political awareness. And we are encouraging the people, also, with good publicity, that they should elect hard-working, responsible, honest people as their leaders. If they have confidence in the leadership, it would be more difficult for anybody to remove that particular leader. So, these are the things which, the sum total of them — there are many — which will help build a stable future for this nation.

EIR: Do the Nigerian people think they are part of this process; that it's not just a formal process of parties, but that the average Nigerian, who is struggling to survive, make a living, take care of his family — does he feel that he is part of this democratic process? Are you satisfied with the voter turnouts? Maybe you could tell us what some of them are, that show the Nigerians are joining in this effort to move into a democratically elected Presidency.

Nasir: I'm satisfied, but I'm not satisfied with the education of the voters. That can be improved a lot —

EIR: Education about the candidates or the issues?

Nasir: By government and candidates, to tell the voter his responsibility, so that we get the best of the people into politics, into contesting elections. I am satisfied that the turnout during the last two elections was reasonable, but I think that with good education that can be improved.

EIR: What was the turnout?

Nasir: It was over 60%. Which, compared with what happened in some of these developed countries, I think this was a reasonable figure. I'm not criticizing them, but one would have to have some comparison.

EIR: There was very little coverage in the Western press of the Constitutional Conference, which took place in 1994, and there is almost no coverage of this democratic process. And, I might add, even though Sudan had a democratically elected Presidency, there has been no recognition of their democratic process either —

Nasir: Yes.

EIR: So, what would you tell the West, and what would you tell Washington, in terms of how serious you and other elder statesmen in Nigeria are about this democratic election process?

Nasir: The United States, in particular: I still want them to remember that they were a colony which fought for freedom, mostly because of taxation. They got away from the mother imperial kingdom of Great Britain. And since then, they have been cherishing freedom of other people; they have been cherishing democracy. But we thought the basis of cherishing all this democracy, is to assist the people to build the government, by the people and of the people. That was one of the cardinal principles of the United States democracy. They should give other people encouragement to do it *themselves*; they should not impose what has been achieved in the United States over the last 200 years.

You see, even with that — take the time of the Second World War. The Japanese-American citizens were *rounded up*, as suspect. So, you cannot build democracy, even in your own country, on the same basis as we can do it in another country, with a different environment.

In Britain, nobody was rounded up, as an ethnic group, as was done in the United States. And that was a condition of the United States, which was not a condition in Britain. So, even today, the conditions available in the United States are not the same conditions as you find in Nigeria, or in Niger, or in Burundi, or in Egypt, or, indeed, in Canada. So, we want them, as a democratic nation and as the number-one world leader today, to remember that part of the Founding Fathers of the United States, were built on religion. Religion is fear of God, and one hopes that with that fear of God, they will be able to be fair and equitable in whatever they do. That is our opinion.

Interview: Chief S.K. Dagogo-Jack

Nigeria prepares for Presidential elections

Chief Dagogo-Jack is chairman of the National Election Commission of Nigeria (NECON). He was interviewed by Lawrence Freeman in Nigeria in October 1997.

EIR: The election in Nigeria is of great concern to the West. Could you tell us how the Nigerian Election Commission was set up, and what its functions are?

Dagogo-Jack: The National Election Commission of Nigeria was inaugurated on Dec. 11, 1995, and was also established under Decree Number Three of 1996. The functions of the commission, are as stated in the decree. The main functions, are to organize, conduct, and supervise all elections and matters pertaining to elections for all elected offices; to register political parties; to determine the eligibility of the