

Nigeria's Abubakar tells nation: 'Let us all move forward'

by Lawrence K. Freeman

Following the deaths of Nigerian Head of State Gen. Sani Abacha and his nemesis Chief M.K. Abiola, many Nigerians in and out of government are expressing optimism about the future of their country. Nigerians from all different factions are giving the new Head of State, Gen. A.A. Abubakar, praise in his current handling of the country. On July 20, in his nationally televised address to the nation, General Abubakar announced that the military will hand the government over to an elected President on May 29, 1999, nine months from now. Considering that General Abacha had a three-year transition plan, this is certainly a tall order, and fraught with all kinds

of potential dangers.

General Abubakar has rejected calls for an interim Government of National Unity, and a National Sovereignty Conference. Instead, under General Abubakar's leadership, the military will remain in power and govern the country until next May, while the general concentrates his efforts on holding the country together, and preparing for the future civilian government. To this end he has received the support from the major "ethnic" groups, previous heads of state, and even from the opposition movement.

It is not expected that he can revive the stagnating economy in such a short period of time; his main task is to preserve the sovereignty of Nigeria for the new leadership. However, General Abubakar, knowing that it is vitally urgent that he rectify, in the short term, the acute fuel crisis plaguing sections of Nigeria, has already intervened into Nigeria's oil importation policy. As one of the richest oil-exporting countries in the world, Nigeria suffers from a lack of refined fuel, even though it has four refineries. Nigeria's refineries have never worked simultaneously at their maximum capacity, forcing the country to purchase petroleum products on the international market and transport them to Nigeria. Many consider the failure to properly maintain the refineries intentional.

In his national address, General Abubakar dissolved the five political parties, the Transitional Implementation Committee, and the National Electoral Commission, formed under Abacha in Nigeria's previous transition program (see *EIR*, Jan. 16, 1998). The Nigerian Constitution, the product of a year-long, delegated Constitutional Conference from 1994-95, will be preserved, but all of the municipal, state, and federal elections have been annulled. A new Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) was created to oversee the transition process under General Abubakar, and the National Council of States was reconstituted with many new State Administrators.

The Petroleum (Special) Trust Fund (PTF), headed by General Buhari, will continue its investment in infrastructure, especially roads, education, and water supply. The National Economic Intelligence Committee (NEIC), led by Prof. Sam

For previews and
information on
LaRouche publications:

**Visit EIR's
Internet Website!**

- Highlights of current issues of EIR
- Pieces by Lyndon LaRouche
- Every week: transcript and audio of the latest **EIR Talks** radio interview.

<http://www.larouchepub.com>

e-mail: **larouche@larouchepub.com**

Aluko, an outspoken opponent of the International Monetary Fund, will also be retained by the current leadership (see *EIR*, Jan. 16). There are indications that the Abubakar government wants to resume more friendly relations with the IMF, the World Bank, and the Paris Club of creditor nations. Under General Abacha, Nigeria had ceased taking any new loans from the IMF.

At the moment, there is an atmosphere of good will toward General Abubakar, who has released all political detainees, and consulted with all groups, including the long-standing National Democratic Coalition (Nadeco) opposition, but the political and economic problems lying ahead are enormous. Given the treacherous role that the British continue to play in Nigeria, and the current meltdown of the global financial system, General Abubakar and Nigeria will need help and understanding to navigate this difficult course.

In the following interview, Lawal Idris, a businessman familiar with the Nigerian government over many years, says, "We must move forward. We have to tell the truth." This same optimism was expressed by General Abubakar in his speech: "Let us all move forward to a new opportunity, with confidence in the present and hope in the future." This sentiment is shared by many Nigerians, who are hopeful that their nation is finally on the right path.

Interview: Lawal Idris

Nigeria requires a national identity

Mr. Idris is a businessman from Kaduna, Nigeria. He was interviewed by telephone on Aug. 3 by Lawrence Freeman.

EIR: A great deal has happened in the last few months. Nigeria's head of state, General Abacha passed away; the leading dissident, Abiola, passed away. What direction do you think Nigeria should take, over the next few months?

Idris: The political field is open to all, and I wish the politicians would be truthful to themselves. The generals say the military is leaving by May 29, 1999, but then there is a snag there, because some people say, let the South take a shot, let the Ibos take a shot, and the minorities are saying, "We want it as well." People are talking, and in one or two months, we will know where we are going.

EIR: What do you mean by, "Let the South take a shot"?

Idris: Let them have the Presidency. But how they are going to do it, I'm not sure.

EIR: One of the things that General Abubakar did, in his speech on July 20, is to disband all five political parties; he said they weren't functioning. He also attacked corruption in his presentation, and he said that a new government, a civilian government, would be in place by May 29, 1999. What do you think? Is that realistic?

Idris: Yes, it can be. I know General Abubakar, and he is not one to go against the Nigerians. He meant every word he said. But it depends on the politicians to make it happen. And, God willing, [the military] will go, on May 29, 1999.

EIR: You mentioned earlier that there has been some discussion in the press, that the Yoruba, especially, are calling for a conference that is being supported by Nadeco [the National Democratic Coalition], a national sovereignty conference. Nadeco has also made proposals that an interim government, to govern for several years, should be picked. General Abubakar did not go in this direction; he said this won't work, and that the military pretty much has to remain in power until the transition is completed in May. What do you think about these calls for a national unity government? Is this the right way to go?

Idris: Never. You see, the majority of Nigerians are united. But the "microscopic Nigerians"—Nadeco and such groups—are not united, because they only look at Nigerian problems from their own point of view: that it has to be done their own way, or not at all. That is, their own type of democracy. So, what Abubakar said, is that there was no need for this congress. If Nadeco wants to form a party as Nadeco, let them go ahead and do it.

Nigeria has passed the point where a tribe can dictate where we go. We have passed the point where we will have a President just because he is a Yoruba, or just because he is an Ibo, or because he is a Hausa. We need a very reliable person who is a *Nigerian*, first and foremost, not a tribal chief.

EIR: Immediately after the death of Chief Abiola, there were some demonstrations and reports of rioting and looting; now things have appeared to calm down. How would you appraise the situation? Is it tense, or are people now prepared to settle down and work together to solve some of the problems?

Idris: At first, when Abacha died, there were no demonstrations, either in the North or the South, because death comes from God. Just as when Abiola was created, God never discussed it with anybody! He came into this world at an appointed time, and he left at an appointed time. But we have to build a nation without Abacha now, and without Abiola. So, we must move forward. We have to tell each other the truth.

Now, there is no tension in Nigeria. There was really not much tension, except in the southwest. And that had been