

NIGERIA *Democracy Update*

The Africa Fund 17 John Street, New York, NY 10038

From The Desk of Human Rights Coordinator Mike Fleshman...

Dear Friend of Freedom in Nigeria,

Since the annulment of free elections in 1993 and the seizure of power by a military dictator, Nigeria's 100 million people have been systematically stripped of their human and civil rights. Thousands of pro-democracy, trade union, women's, student and religious leaders have been jailed, many without charge or trial. The Nigerian Constitution is suspended, the rule of law replaced by military decrees and the free press shackled. An elected President enters his fourth year in prison without trial for the "crime" of winning the 1993 vote. In the rich Nigerian oil fields, the brutal assault on the indigenous Ogoni people has continued unabated since the execution of Ogoni environmentalist Ken Saro-Wiwa and eight others in November 1995. While Shell, Mobil, Chevron and their business partners in the Nigerian military dictatorship earn billions of dollars selling oil to the United States, malnutrition among Nigerian people tops 40 percent.

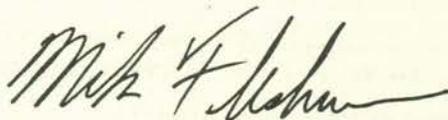
In the face of this repression we continue to hear from our contacts inside Nigeria that the struggle for justice and democracy in Nigeria remains vibrant. But it is a story that you will not see on the evening news or read in the morning paper. Today it can be difficult to locate information about Nigeria in the press, and harder still to follow developments in the growing U.S. movement in solidarity with the democratic movement.

That is why The Africa Fund has begun a new occasional publication, *Nigeria Democracy Update*, to help keep you informed about important developments in the freedom struggle. In this first issue, for example, we have reprinted the September 17 testimonies of exiled Nobel Laureate Wole Soyinka and Africa Fund Executive Director Jennifer Davis before the New York City Council. They were among the prominent people speaking in favor of a motion to name the street corner in front of Nigeria's New York Consulate in honor of Kudirat Abiola, the wife of imprisoned President Moshood Abiola, who was assassinated in June 1996.

Nigeria Democracy Update also reprints an article from the September 26 *New York Times* about the Nigerian government's harassment of U.S. Ambassador Walter Carrington.

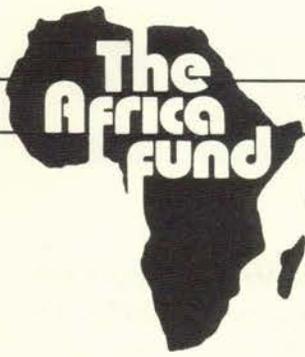
I hope you will find this new resource useful in your work to restore freedom in Nigeria. We hope to include reports of local events and activities, so please contact me with your news at (212) 962-1210.

In solidarity,



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- *U.S. Ambassador Harassed*
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THE NEW YORK TIMES **INTERNATIONAL** FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 26, 1997

U.S. Envoy to Nigeria Is Given a Stormy Farewell

By HOWARD W. FRENCH

ABIDJAN, Ivory Coast, Sept. 25 — When Walter Carrington, a lifelong African specialist, became the American Ambassador to Nigeria four years ago, soon after the military leadership annulled the most democratic elections that country had ever held, he knew that his assignment would not be easy.

From the time of his arrival to his final weeks in the job, before heading to a Harvard University fellowship early next month, Mr. Carrington has found himself butting heads with the leaders of Africa's most populous country on a range of issues that run from democracy and human rights to international drug trafficking.

But nothing could have prepared Mr. Carrington for the seeming final act in his ambassadorship, when state security officials undertook a campaign of intimidation against people who have organized farewell parties for him.

In what Mr. Carrington, a 67-year-old lawyer with a 38-year-long familiarity with Nigeria called "the most surrealistic experience I have had here yet," heavily armed policemen burst into a well-attended reception in Mr. Carrington's honor in Lagos last week, threatened to shoot one speaker and ordered the foreign guests, including the American Ambassador, to leave at once.

After grabbing the microphone away from an elderly man who had begun to make introductory remarks in honor of Mr. Carrington, witnesses said, one policeman threatened to shoot another human rights activist who defiantly grabbed another microphone and sought to address the stunned crowd.

Earlier that evening, Mr. Carrington

said, a police unit cordoned off the area where the farewell was originally supposed to take place, and forbade the Ambassador and others entry, forcing the Nigerian human rights and pro-democracy groups that had organized the reception to shift it elsewhere.

"The leader of the police unit could be heard saying loudly on his hand-held radio, 'Sir, we have located the place, the U.S. Ambassador is here, and we are going to break up the meeting,'" Mr. Carrington said. "And when we were leaving we could hear the same man saying that they had succeeded, and that the Ambassador was leaving."

Washington has since filed what diplomats call a "strong protest" with Nigeria, calling the breakup of the reception "scandalous."

But the protest did not prompt an official apology from Gen. Sani Abacha's Government. Instead, this week the Nigerian Minister for Special Presidential Affairs, Alhaji Wada Nas, launched into a scathing attack on Mr. Carrington.

Mr. Nas was quoted by Agence France-Presse as saying "his stay in Nigeria must be described as four years of waste during which nothing was accomplished between the two countries in economic, cultural or political terms."

Throughout Mr. Carrington's tenure in Nigeria, senior officials of that country have interpreted the deep chill that permeates ties between Washington and the Nigerian capital, Abuja, as the reflection of Mr. Carrington's efforts to poison relations.

In interviews with local news organizations, Nigerian officials have repeatedly said that Mr. Carrington's support of human rights and

democracy in a country long ruled by the military, did not reflect Washington's official views of their country.

Instead, in a string of attacks that often have a poisonous personal quality, Nigerian officials have depicted Mr. Carrington, who is black, as part of a corrupt African-American elite that publicly criticizes Nigeria in the

Advocacy of human rights angers Nigerians.

secret hope that Abuja will offer to buy their silence with generous financial donations.

During a wave of bombing incidents in Nigeria last year, Mr. Carrington was summoned by the Foreign Minister on Christmas Eve for an official dressing down.

Senior Government officials publicly complained about a safety warning by the American Embassy to American travelers to Nigeria, and hinted that Mr. Carrington, who has openly maintained close contacts with opposition groups, had knowledge of the attacks.

For Mr. Carrington, there is no mystery why relations between the United States and Nigeria have been so rocky during his tenure.

"I came here in November 1993, a few months after the annulment of the elections of June '93, and I was here 12 days before the military under Abacha staged its palace coup and took over the Government," Mr. Carrington said. "Our Government

put on sanctions in response to the annulment. Before that our Government had already banned flights between the United States and Nigeria because of security concerns.

"And a few months after I arrived, a third set of sanctions were slapped on because of a finding that Nigeria was not cooperating in narcotics matters." In none of these areas, Mr. Carrington said, had there been enough progress in Washington's view to lift sanctions.

Relations between the two countries worsened after the November 1995 execution of the playwright and minority rights advocate Ken Saro-Wiwa. Mr. Carrington and two dozen other ambassadors were temporarily recalled in protest.

As he prepares to leave Nigeria for Harvard, his alma mater, Mr. Carrington responded to the personal attacks against him by voicing his own of regret over the state of Africa's most populous and potentially most powerful nation.

"This is a country richer in human resources than almost anyplace I can think of," he said, "and it is rich in natural resources too. And yet Nigeria is a country ranked by the United Nations as one of the poorest places in the world, and ranked by some as one of the most corrupt countries in the world.

"As a black American, this deeply saddens me. This is a place that should be one of the leading countries in the world. But until they are able to resolve the problem of allowing the people to choose their leaders democratically, I am afraid they are not going to be able to realize this potential."

"THE TRANSITION PROGRAMME IS ON COURSE"
Testimony Before the New York City Council in Favor of Kudirat Abiola Corner
by Professor Wole Soyinka, September 17, 1997

It justifies extra-judicial killings, it accommodates state-sponsored arson attacks on media houses, the torture and arbitrary imprisonment of journalists. It legitimizes the three-year imprisonment of a President-elect, sanctifies the fabrication of a phantom coup attempt that ropes in a former Head of State and internationally reputed statesmen and a host of other victims, including a female editor whose journal boldly refuted the existence of such a coup attempt. All are serving lengthy terms of imprisonment after secret trials. Even the personal lawyer of the condemned Head of State was not spared his own dose of detention.

The transition programme is on course! It vindicates the pauperization of a nation, the abrogation of labor unions and the detention of their elected leaders, scattered in the remotest comers of Nigeria and denied all contact with their colleagues and families. It justifies the ninety-day detention laws, infinitely renewable, whose severity would cause even the Apartheid machine to wince. *The transition programme is on course* acquits a singularly brutal regime of all crimes against humanity. *The transition programme is on course* beggars South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission since it is operational even before the act; it grants absolution before and amnesia after - at least, among the foreign policy advisers of a number of governments. The signals we receive indicate that the United States is sliding fast into this revisionist groove.

The transition programme is on course propagates the doctrine of open political cynicism by a scam of municipal elections where any critic of the regime, any known or suspected advocate of true democracy is disqualified from contesting. It disenfranchises the majority of Nigerians, replaces the ballot box with the *fiat* of state governors who inflict on the populace their predictable choice of sycophants and lickspittles as city councillors. The *defacto* Chief Electoral Officer, General Sani Abacha, has of course reserved the last word for himself. Even after such elections are concluded and the council has begun to function, he has empowered himself to remove or replace any council chairman.

Never however, not until 20th August 1997, has this sanctimonious alibi - a flagrant lie in itself - been subjected to such indecent exploitation as in a letter of that date by the Consul General of Nigeria in Washington addressed to the Honorable Peter Vallone of the New York City Council, *The transition programme is on course* becomes the reason why a symbolic New York street corner should not be co-named Alhaja Kudirat Abiola in memory and in honor of the late wife of Nigeria's President-Elect. Kudirat Abiola was cut down in broad daylight on the streets of Lagos, the commercial capital of Nigeria.

The Consul-General ascribes the word "vindictive" to the decision of the City Council. I cannot think of an act more vindictive, more tasteless and cowardly, than this attempt to pursue a murdered victim beyond her grave, agitating against a posthumous honor that she richly deserves - no matter who her murderers may be. In my part of the world, we term the Consul-General's conduct an abomination. I hope that New Yorkers find it equally so.

Regarding the Consul General's claim to speak for Nigerians, we have no doubt whatever that there will be found indeed Nigerians who acknowledge his right to speak on their behalf, and express a readiness to back his advocacy. To label them "truth-loving" however is to libel Truth. In their own times, Adolf Hitter, Idi Amin Dada, Nicolae Caecescu, Sergeant Doe, Hastings Banda, Mobutu Sese Seko and other scavenger birds of passage did not lack for flocks of satellite twitterers, ready and able to testify that these proven monsters were the very paragons of

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humanistic virtues. We are well aware of the power of Nigeria's petro-dollar. We know that its domain extends even beyond the temporary residencies of "truth-loving Nigerians" and into the skid rows of American cities, where vagrants are often recruited on generous pay and the promise of a hot meal to counter-demonstrate before Nigerian missions, ostensibly in support of the regime of a country which, as far as they are concerned, could very well be located on Mars. The testimonies of these innocent mercenaries will be found in videotaped interviews of various television stations.

We know also, alas, and to the shame of a tiny minority of black leaders in this country, that the might of Nigeria's petro-dollar also extends to some of the not-so-needy elite. Some are ministers of religion, others publishers, legislators and even academics who once earned themselves respectable niches in the history of the Civil Rights movement. Such individuals sadly betray the history of the struggle of black peoples in this country. They desecrate the memories of the slave rebel, Cinque, of Sojourner Truth, of Martin Luther King, Rosa Parks and other immortals of the black liberation struggle. All societies - and ours is no exception - possess their own criminal class, and the choice that the Abacha collaborationists in this country have made is to wine and dine with, and adulate the descendants of our own criminal class who sold them into slavery in that not-so-distant past those who made possible the despoliation of a continent and reduced its citizens to a second-class humanity in the eyes of the world.

Alhaja Kudirat Abiola was NOT killed by "unknown assailants" as alleged by the Consul-General. We know who killed Kudirat and why, and the facts will be placed before the World at the appropriate time. We can point to the exact location of the house in Abuja where Abacha's killer squad is lodged and we have tracked down all details of their movements on that fatal day. Abacha's guilt is spattered all over the innermost walls of his bunker. It remains one of the most diabolical acts of an utterly depraved regime that it proceeded to round up members of the family of Kudirat Abiola, and her colleagues in the pro-democracy movement - including a septuagenarian, Chief Adesanya - on "suspicion" of being implicated in the murder of this lady. No grounds for such suspicion were ever advertised; there were none. They were released months afterwards, after all traces linking the murders to Abacha's door had been effectively erased, and potential witnesses silenced. The arrest of Kudirat's loyal associates was an obscene "in-your-eye" statement to the entire nation, and only fools or villains will pretend that it was otherwise.

From the scant resources for our struggle, we succeeded in setting up a democratic opposition radio which broadcasts to Nigeria every day for just one solitary, but highly treasured hour by most Nigerians, even in the military barracks. We have since renamed that station "Radio Kudirat, Nigeria: The Voice of Democracy." That decision honors us, and honors all lovers of freedom and justice. It will be a dishonor to the people of the City of New York if the Council permits itself to be stampeded by a guilt-ridden regime - never mind its shameless parade of lobbyists - into reversing a decision that was taken on behalf of millions of repressed "truth-lovers" of Nigeria, and in the tradition of the loftiest ideals of the coming-in-being of the United States.

Sojourner Truth is hard at work in her technologic reincarnation on the surface of Mars, a statement of the boundless, questing spirit of humanity. That naming is not devoid of meaning-, it surely reminds the people of America at once of their shameful beginnings and their conquest of shame, it symbolizes their continuing quest for a just society despite present imperfections. Let Sojourner Truth's progeny and torch-bearer, Kudirat Abiola, silenced in her prime, find voice and presence in that designated corner of New York. Let that name be raised here, and everywhere, to provoke the conscience of a too complacent world.

**Testimony Before The New York City Council in Favor of Kudirat Abiola Corner
by Jennifer Davis, Executive Director, September 17, 1997**

Chairman Foster and members of the Parks, Recreation and International Intergroup Relations Committee,

It is my great pleasure to appear before you again and to join Nobel Laureate Wole Soyinka, Hafsat Abiola, David Dinkins and so many other outstanding Americans and Nigerians in support of the co-naming of the northeast corner of 2nd Avenue and 44th Street after Nigerian democracy leader Kudirat Abiola.

Let me first extend my congratulations to Councilmember Andrew Eristoff on the recent birth of a daughter, Ann. As a mother and grandmother I know the joy you feel, Councilmember. I wish you, your wife and your new daughter the very best in the years ahead.

But we are here today not to celebrate a daughter, but to honor a mother of seven, Kudirat Abiola, who sacrificed her life for her family and for Nigeria. As you know Mr. Chairman, Mrs. Abiola, the wife of imprisoned Nigerian President-elect Moshood Abiola, was murdered execution-style on a Lagos street on June 4, 1996.

It is right and appropriate for the Council to honor Mrs. Abiola in this way:

right because Mrs. Abiola gave her life in the struggle for democracy and freedom in Nigeria.

appropriate because of the Council's adoption of Resolutions 1082A and 1852 condemning the Nigerian military dictatorship's brutal repression and Mrs. Abiola's assassination.

It is not my intention to try the Nigerian dictatorship for the murder of Mrs. Abiola. That must wait the return of democracy and the restoration of the rule of law in Nigeria, Mr. Chairman. But all the known circumstances suggest strongly that the Nigerian military dictatorship was involved in the assassination of Kudirat Abiola, an articulate and fearless campaigner for her husband's release and the rebirth of democracy, She had been detained by the regime just weeks before her murder, and faced trial for possessing pro-democracy pamphlets.

In an interview published shortly before her death she had publicly protested harassment by state security agents in a Peugeot station wagon -- the same model used by her assassins in their escape. She had just passed through an army roadblock on her way to the Canadian Embassy to press for stronger support for democracy when her killers struck.

Official Nigerian descriptions of her murder as a robbery attempt were rejected out of hand by the U.S. State Department, which described Mrs. Abiola's death as an apparent assassination and called for an investigation. The Council should note that, to date, only members of the Abiola family and senior leaders of the Nigerian democracy movement have been held for interrogation about the murder and no arrests have been made.

Sadly the repression and injustice that ended Mrs. Abiola's life has only escalated since my last appearance before this committee. Despite promises of democracy Nigeria's 110 million people are still denied their most basic human and civil rights. The Nigerian constitution remains suspended, the free press remains shackled. Thousands of human rights and democracy leaders, including President Abiola, statesman Olesegun Obasanjo, trade unionist Frank Kokori and 19 environmentalists, members of the minority Ogoni people, still languish in the dictator's prisons. Recent reports from the U.S. State Department, Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch and the United

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Nations Commission for Human Rights make the extent and severity of human rights abuses by the regime tragically clear.

Mr. Chairman, over the course of this hearing those opposed to the co-naming measure have asserted that Nigerian dictator General Sani Abacha has now begun a transition to democracy. But in fact Nigeria has already been through a decade-long transition to democracy, which culminated in the Presidential election of 1993 that was won by Moshood Abiola. That election was declared free and fair by Nigerian and international observers. There is no need now for more transitions and more years of military rule. There is only the need for the dictatorship to transfer power to the elected President and return to barracks.

The Nigerian democracy movement has rejected Abacha's so-called transition as a smokescreen for continued military rule. The demand for democracy, Mr. Chairman, REAL DEMOCRACY, does not come from The Africa Fund or the U.S. State Department or the New York City Council. It emerges from the Nigerian people, who, like Mrs. Abiola risk and often sacrifice their lives for that freedom.

Apologists for oppression do not tell the Council that Abacha will likely be the only candidate for President under the government plan. They cannot explain how this transition can be legitimate when opposition parties are banned, political leaders imprisoned, and freedom of speech, assembly and of the press are wholly denied. They cannot explain why an elected President enters his third year in prison without trial when his only crime was to win a free and fair election.

The good news Mr. Chairman, is that the American people are responding to the Nigerian peoples' call for support with growing solidarity. In recent months organizations as diverse as the United States Conference of Mayors, the United Church of Christ, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, the Coalition of Black Trade Unionists and the Progressive National Baptist Convention have adopted resolutions condemning the brutality of the Nigerian military dictatorship and urging the restoration of democracy. Yesterday in Washington hundreds of concerned citizens met their state Congressional delegations in support of Congressional sanctions legislation. City governments are passing local sanctions laws and resolutions in support of Nigerian democracy. And on October 5 churches across the country will observe Nigerian Freedom Sunday to work and pray for the release of Nigerian political prisoners.

The motion before the New York City Council provides a crest to the wave of American actions and initiatives supporting the Nigerian people in their struggle. I urge this committee to support this measure and to reject any further delay in the process.

As a New Yorker I am proud that my city will act as forcefully for the victims of oppression in Nigeria as it did for the victims of oppression in South Africa. As a daughter of Africa I celebrate the Council's refusal to condone any dictator, white or Black, who denies his people freedom, justice and democracy.

Surely no advocate for Africa can feel insulted when the city honors an African freedom fighter. You and I Mr. Chairman, remember the day the city raised the sign naming the corner in front of apartheid South Africa's consulate Nelson and Winnie Mandela Corner. Only democracy's enemies, officials and supporters of the oppressive white regime protested about the strength of New York's support for freedom. Far from insulting Africa, Mr. Chairman, Kudirat Abiola Corner will affirm our city's belief in Africa and in the right and ability of African peoples to fashion government of, by, and for Africans. The only insult to Africa comes from those who oppose African democracy and African liberation.