



The American Committee on Africa

17 John Street • New York, NY 10038 • (212) 962-1210

Fax: (212) 964-8570 • E-mail: africafund@igc.apc.org

Wyatt Tee Walker, *President*

Michael A. Battle, Sr., *Vice President*

David Scott, *Vice President*

Canon Frederick B. Williams, *Treasurer*

Jennifer Davis, *Executive Director*

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Rights leaders urge Clinton to tighten Nigerian boycott

A delegation of American religious and civil and human rights leaders met at the White House last week with National Security Council adviser Samuel Berger to discuss United States policy toward the Nigerian military dictatorship. They were headed by former Martin Luther King chief of staff Rev. Wyatt Tee Walker, National Council of Churches (NCC) General Secretary Rev. Joan Campbell and American Committee on Africa (ACOA) Executive Director Jennifer Davis. The delegation also met with senior officials of the Mobil Oil Company, a major U.S. investor in that oil-rich African nation. Rev. Tyrone Pitts, general secretary of the 2 million-member Progressive National Baptist Convention Inc. and Bishop Felton May of the United Methodist Church completed the delegation.

The group presented Berger with the Declaration of Conscience on Nigeria, calling for the immediate restoration of human rights and democracy. It was signed by 70 religious leaders from across the country. Campbell, representing 51 million American Christians affiliated with the NCC, presented Berger with a copy of a special World Council of Churches report on oppression in the Nigerian oil fields.

The delegation described their meetings with Berger, President Clinton's top foreign policy adviser, as friendly and open. It provided a useful dialogue on the continuing crises in Nigeria, Africa's most populous state and the largest U.S. trading partner in Africa.

"Our objective," said ACOA executive director Jennifer Davis, "was to share with the White House the growing public concern about the brutality of the Nigerian military regime and the urgent need of the United States to use its economic influence to support democracy." The United States buys nearly half of Nigeria's annual oil output, generating billions of dollars for the military dictatorship.

"The delegation urged the administration to impose sanctions to support democracy," said Davis.

The delegation also met with senior officials of the Mobil Oil Company, which currently produces 500,000 barrels of oil a day in Nigeria. The leadership of the delegation, joined by South African pastor Mangedwa Nyathi, raised specific concerns about Mobil's business ties to the regime and its links to the security forces. Mobil produces over 100 million barrels of oil a year for the Nigerian government and pays the salaries of armed Nigerian security forces.

"We appreciate that Mobil is in business to make money," said Walker, who also serves as ACOA president. "But we reminded the company that slavery too was profitable. We must never accept that profits are more important than human life. At some point someone must bite the bullet and do what is required for freedom."

The delegation was sponsored by ACOA, which played a leading role in the campaign for sanctions against apartheid South Africa.