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## Interview: Minister Jerry Gana

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# 'No democracy without a sound economy'

*Professor Jerry Gana, Honorable Minister for Information and Culture of the Nigerian government, was interviewed by telephone to the Nigerian capital, Abuja, on May 31 by Lydia Cherry.*

**EIR:** I understand that forged letters have been circulating to the effect that the Nigerian ambassador to the United States has resigned. There is a full-scale press campaign against Nigeria in the U.S. press now, given Nigeria's stance against the International Monetary Fund [IMF].

**Gana:** If you are referring to some of the information that has been passed around that is not based on fact, I would say that this is very unfortunate. What is important, though, is that a lot of what is being circulated abroad about the Nigerian situation does not reflect the reality on the ground. The reality on the ground, in the first place in terms of our political position to democracy, is one of a very definite commitment to a people-oriented democracy; this is why we are holding a constitutional conference where the people of Nigeria will gather through elected delegates and decide the nature, the character, the direction of this democracy, so that it will be deeply rooted in the popular will of our people.

In terms of the areas of the economy, the information that is being given outside certainly again is wrong. The direction of this budget is to ensure that we shift resources *decisively* from the consumption sector, from the areas of speculative investment to one of *production*. We believe that an economy can only be revived through production. There has been a lot of disinformation deliberately out there, so as to confuse the international community about the reality of the Nigerian situation. Unfortunately for us, this is in a year when we don't have enough resources to pump into the information sector. Right now we really want to beef up industry, beef up agriculture, prepare the transition to general democracy; these are vital areas that are so important in the internal mobilization that we have not been able to pay attention much, as far as injection of a lot of resources into the external publicity.

**EIR:** Last December, President Abacha gave a budget speech in which he turned Nigeria on a more viable track by which survival might be possible. What has been the international reaction?

**Gana:** We felt that if the international community, particularly those who would want the Nigerian economy to be revived, should have approved and appreciated and encouraged us in the direction of the kind of thing we are trying to do. Because previous to that budget, a lot of the resources within the country were just being wasted on speculative investments. Nobody was really investing in the fundamental areas of agriculture, of industrial production, of engineering, of the kind of thing that will move the nation forward! So, we believe that the budget was in the right direction, but then of course, the IMF and the World Bank didn't quite like that, and all kinds of things are being said, unfortunately. We believe the direction of the budget is correct.

The direction of the political agenda also is correct, because having a Constitutional Conference where we all sit down and generate a new consensus on how we move to regenerate democracy, is the most valid way to having a transition to democracy. We believe that is correct. We are glad that some of the most serious political leaders in the nation have won election [to the Constitutional Conference]. They have now been mandated to come to the center so that the community leaders can now sit and look at the problems of Nigeria—political, economic, social and otherwise—and find new valid ways of moving forward. We believe that this ought to have been supported by the lovers of democracy abroad. We believe, for example, that if the American government really wants democracy in Nigeria, the kind of thing that should have happened was to have helped this government to now move to this position of democracy, instead of frustrating it. If this Constitutional Conference doesn't hold, then we will not be able to return quickly to party politics.

This is why we are surprised. Instead . . . they are listening to people who do not have the mandate of the people; these are people who have access to the media at home and abroad. But they cannot win an election in their own ward. Democracy is about people's mandate. If you are really talking about electing democracy, this must be about people saying, "Look, this is what we want."

**EIR:** History shows that in economics we can trace two currents—what used to be referred to in the United States as American System economics, versus the British System, the East India Company, the supposed "free market." President Abacha's economic policy appears to be based on the American System, especially the decision to channel 60% of investment into agriculture and industry.

**Gana:** This is it. I'm so glad that you have located it in the contents of American economic history. This is exactly what happened. What is surprising is that they don't want us to do things to revive our own national economy. Your economy cannot move forward if you don't deal with the productive sectors; it is the only way an economy can move forward. You must expand those areas that would generate income, generate employment, generate goods and services, and this

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is exactly what we want to do. But unfortunately, the international community, the London Club, the Paris Club, they seem to be against this particular national effort to revive the Nigerian economy. We need help in communicating this to the international community, that what we are doing is in the interests of the popular masses of Nigerians. The alternative is to be tied up to a very speculative economy that will not generate any gross, and there will be no development here.

**EIR:** And it will drive the economy into the criminal realm, as IMF policies have promoted the drug trade around the world.

**Gana:** Even in the case of Nigeria, just a few. There are millions of Nigerians who are men and women of integrity, who work hard every day, who are excelling in their various professions. . . . But nobody focusses on that. But one drug pusher—it is being promoted so that people think of Nigeria as a whole population of drug pushers.

Democracy cannot survive if we are not able to build a sound economy—a sound economy that can back it up. This is why we must restructure our economy as we move toward democracy. The international community should help us to restructure the economy, to fuel it in such a way that the production of goods will take off, so that we can sustain democracy. But the people who should help us are the very people who are now positioned against us, so that our economy will be weak, so when democracy comes back again it will be on a very weak foundation. This is what we cannot understand.

**EIR:** Because the whole international economy is rapidly coming apart at the seams, *EIR* founder Lyndon LaRouche insists that what the most far-sighted countries must do is to hang on themselves and interconnect with like countries, so that when the overall economic crash comes, you can put together a new international economic system.

**Gana:** This is the kind of thinking that governed the preparation of the current budget. Therefore, we were delighted when we realized that it agrees with your analysis in that direction.

To conclude, we as a government are very committed to a genuine return to democracy, and this is why every effort is being made to ensure that the Constitutional Conference

is a gathering of truly mandated, elected people from their various communities, together here in the national headquarters of Abuja to discuss the basic problems facing the nation, with a view to finding durable solutions, so that when we have that return to democracy, which we are all working toward, it will be a durable and people-oriented democracy, popularly rooted in the will of the people. Therefore, we are very unhappy that the lovers of democracy abroad are listening to those who are fighting against this particular return to general democracy, on the basis that they are the very people who are not even willing to offer themselves to be elected in their constituencies. I'm talking about some of the people who, even within their supposed pro-democracy groups, don't even want to practice democracy. For example, this Campaign for Democracy group here: Internally they don't really believe in democracy—it's all hypocrisy; they simply want political power. The group has now split on that very basis. People who don't want to share power democratically with others. For example, they wanted to manipulate the students here, so that undemocratic means would be used to impose unpopular leadership on the students. Those who are fighting for something other than democracy are the ones who are receiving great international attention, because they are crying the loudest.

**EIR:** One hypothetical question: What if at this Constitutional Convention, the majority of the people say, "We want to go back to being under the IMF; we want the IMF to control our economy," what would you do?

**Gana:** The budget was greeted with tremendous joy in Nigeria. I went to every state after the budget to explain the programs of this administration. In every state, I was received with tremendous joy; people were very happy that the government had taken a decision on the economic program. I don't believe Nigerians want to go back to the IMF; they rioted against it before we came in! There will be no question about this at all. The IMF prescription was going to make the Nigerian economy *so dependent* on the international system; that our own resources here would lie wasted; we wouldn't be able to develop it. Because the way we were going, the cost of bringing machinery and other things here was so exorbitant that we would never have been able to transform anything.