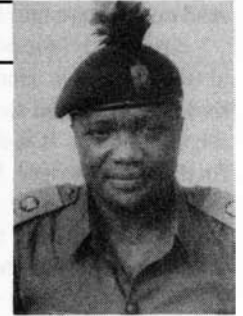

Interview: Lt. Col. Dauda Musa Komo



There is a real potential for development in Nigeria

Colonel Komo is the administrator/governor of Rivers State, Nigeria's largest oil-producing state. Lawrence Freeman and Uwe Friesecke interviewed him on July 4.

EIR: What percentage of oil produced in Nigeria comes from your region?

Komo: There are about eight states that constitute the major petroleum-producing states in Nigeria. Of the eight, Rivers State is the largest producer of oil. Its contribution ranges from 30 to 45% of total oil produced in Nigeria, which is quite substantial.

EIR: Have you seen, over the past several months, an improvement in the development, exploration, and export of oil, since you have reformed some of the structural adjustment programs?

Komo: The reforming of the structural adjustment program started earlier, before I became the governor of Rivers State. However, in the last seven months in which I have been governor, we have taken a number of steps to correct certain distortions on the ground that had tended to affect the production of oil from Rivers State. If an oil company has an obligation to the community, we use our authority and position to ensure that the oil company fulfills its obligation. At the same time, where communities are making unreasonable demands, we point that out to them clearly, and also tell them of our responsibility to ensure that oil companies are allowed to operate, as long as they comply with all the terms of the agreement and the regulations of the land.

EIR: Could you tell us more about the alleged conflict with the Ogani people that is going on in Rivers State? This continues to be given press play in the United States and Britain, that the Oganis' rights are being violated.

Komo: I'm glad you used the words "alleged conflict." This conflict regarding the Ogani people, unlike the way the western media report it, can be better understood by noting the Oganis' relationship with other ethnic groups in the state. For example, in the case of the Andoni-Ogani conflicts that took place in the state last year, it was the Oganis that attacked the Andoni people, initially. You have had Ogani-Andoki

conflicts. The Oganis some time ago attacked an Andoki village. The Andokis are in the Ibo-speaking part of the state; the Ibo-speaking people are generally Christians, and they were in church services last Easter Sunday, when the Ogani people attacked them.

Second, you have Oganis versus the petrol companies in the state. Shell had virtually closed all its operations on the internal Ogani land. Right now, there isn't any oil exploration or activity taking place on Ogani land.

The biggest conflict with respect to the Oganis, however, is conflict within this ethnic group. This was most clearly seen in what happened this spring when Ken Saro-Wiwa's NYCOP [National Youth Council of Ogani People] attacked four prominent Ogani sons and killed them, put the bodies in a car, pushed it off into the bush, and set it afire. There is law and order there now, because we have deployed security forces. A lot of the villagers that initially fled out of fear, have now come back. We are executing federal government projects in that area which had been stopped before. Basic services and facilities are now being provided to these communities. We've also made progress in arresting a number of the people who took part in the earlier killings.

EIR: So the people who are leading this movement of the Ogani people are actually harming the economic self-interest of the people in this area?

Komo: Yes, I think they are, because the only real economic activity in the area has been that of Shell. Now, since they chased Shell out, there is no more such activity, and the people are virtually without anything to fall back on.

People like Ken Saro-wiwa, who are causing this havoc, have no investment in Ogani land. Ken Saro-wiwa has two houses in London; his family is also in Britain. But he and others have scared other investors from coming to invest in Ogani land, and therefore the people have remained virtually like prisoners, without any form of development. Even contractors who are sent there by the federal government to provide road networks, electricity supplies, water—these are social services; it doesn't matter what your standpoint is on issues, surely you should allow such services to come to your people. But these people have stopped such projects before.

And now we are making sure that these projects go on.

Apparently, the point is to keep the Oganis in the perpetual state they have been in, so that they could make a case that they had produced so much oil here before, but look now at the negligence. It is as if nobody was trying to do *anything* for the Ogani people. My press secretary is from Rivers State, and he knows some instances where electrical cables that were bringing power to the area were physically cut, in quite a few areas. Poles have been knocked down; contractors involved in different projects have been chased out. In the recent period, since we have stopped these things from happening, these same contractors have been instructed that they must go back there and provide these basic services to the people.

EIR: What is the role that is being played by the Movement for the Survival of the Ogani People? What do they object to so much about what is going on there?

Komo: The MFSO movement was founded by serious Ogani individuals, including some of those who were recently killed by this group. The initial objective was to bring to the attention of the federal government the fact that the area has not received the necessary attention that it ought to receive as an oil-producing community. Ken Saro-wiwa was initially the press secretary for the movement, but he eventually managed to independently create this youth wing of the MFSO movement, the National Youth Council of Ogani People. He accomplished this in the way in which, in George Orwell's *Animal Farm*, Napoleon created a puppet, while Snowball was busy working for the welfare of the animals on the farm. But people wanted MFSO activities to be non-violent, more in Martin Luther King's footsteps, so they objected to creating a militant wing, the NYCOP. This is where the split came about.

Ken Saro-wiwa managed to change all the leaders, including the president, who had established MFSO in the first place, accusing them of being agents of Shell. He claimed that they had been bribed heavily by Shell and therefore they were now like traitors, compromising Ogani interests, and he, Saro-wiwa, was now the savior—and of course he would use NYCOP, to get reparations of about \$36 billion from Shell, and that every Ogani individual didn't have to work, because each one would have at least \$1 million. This sounds like fiction, but if you go to Rivers State, this is the story that is believed. He further promised them an *independent state*, not part of Nigeria, but a totally independent country. The United Nations was going to come to their aid, he claimed, and also the United States, to ensure that this dream would materialize, and therefore the Oganis would be like the Kuwaitis. So many Oganis are so deprived, that when he planted these utopian dreams within them, he became an instant hero. This is how he was able to get rid of the level-headed MFSO individuals. Ogani territory is only 12 miles by 35 miles. You can't make that a country!

Thus, the situation in Ogani land became more and more lawless. All of this clearly served Ken Saro-wiwa's interest, to get the attention he wanted from the U.N. and western countries that seem to be ready to move in to helping anybody described as an "underdog" or an "underprivileged people." This guy is an international con-man. I think he wants to use the suffering Ogani people as his stepping stone, maybe to getting some Nobel award. But it is clear that by murdering these prominent citizens, he went too far.

EIR: It is very interesting that you brought up the way he was given promises by the United Nations. We have seen the U.N. act in many places throughout the world to undermine the sovereignty of nation-states:

Komo: I think it is unfortunate if the U.N. sits there and thinks that an individual can just give them a one-sided, half-truth version of a story, and that is enough to justify believing in the integrity of that individual, whom they previously had never heard of before. They never bothered to check how he became what he is, or even what he doing. They have not even bothered to send an *independent* team to check out the situation here. I think the U.N. is becoming a willing tool, almost an element of or a party to the conspiracy to undermine sovereignty. I think one of these days, just like any good organization, the U.N. may find that it has gone too far, because after all, it is sovereign, independent states that make up the United Nations. I don't think many countries are going to keep on tolerating indefinitely a U.N. meddling and undermining their authority.

Granted, there are some really horrible governments in the world, but that is not an excuse to create this notion that everyone in government is criminally minded and should not be trusted. If the U.N. wanted to, it could come to Rivers State; we will take them to Ogani land, it's an open place. So why are they afraid of coming here?

EIR: The Nigerian military government is, as you know, increasingly attacked in the British press and the American press in particular. How do you see the future and the resolution of the current crisis?

Komo: You are in Nigeria now, and by today there was supposed to have been a strike. Listening to the reportage on CNN, you would think that Nigeria has ground to a halt. Watching CNN about Nigerian issues, you would think that there is a great deal of insecurity here. But now, since you have been in Nigeria, have you seen a country in crisis? The "crisis" in Nigeria is greatly connected to the press—your press and ours. The press here have largely been bought off for a long time. You've been in Lagos, and that is where the strike activity is supposed to be having the most effect. I came from Lagos this morning. People are largely going about their normal business; shops are open.

The press keeps dwelling on Nigeria's "political crisis," and insisting that Abiola be given the presidency. But Abiola

is CNN's president.

EIR: How great was the danger of civil war and breakup of the country in the summer of last year?

Komo: I think it was fairly great. Discussion that took place at a meeting in Kaduna State is on record, in which eastern governors threatened to secede if Abiola were given the presidency. This was a meeting of the governors who were on the NRC [National Republican Convention]. At the end of their conference, the eastern governors, who spoke on behalf of the seven eastern states, said, and I quote: "If June 12 was revisited"—that is, if the [election] result, cancelled by the previous regime, was revisited, and Abiola was made President—"the eastern part of the country was going to secede." Now, if that were to happen and they seceded, what then would Nigeria be faced with? Do we allow them to go? If we didn't allow that to happen in the 1960s—during the civil war here—are we going to allow them to do that now? Should we play it out, assuming they are bluffing?

EIR: You are a military man; do you want to see democracy come to Nigeria and the military no longer involved in directing the government?

Komo: Absolutely. One thing that people don't realize, is that any time the military is in government, it is the military profession that suffers. But it is always the civilians that call the military back to come and take over. This is a fact! It is not a secret. Having created a mess, having reached a point where they cannot agree, then they say, "Okay, let the military come in." And they keep pressuring, pumping the military. "What are you doing? Are you waiting until the country is finished before you act?" Not that the military is always looking with their pencil and scoreboard. But what I am saying is that those of us who are serious about the military job, I think, will always feel that any time we go into politics, it is a bad thing for the military. What we want to see is stable, responsible, and serious democratically elected government in Nigeria.

EIR: I saw an article you wrote on education. What do you think is the direction that Nigeria has to go in?

Komo: Unfortunately, the educational sector has suffered neglect on a number of fronts. I can categorize this broadly on three fronts. One, the neglect of the basic infrastructure that actually houses educational institutions. High school facilities: The buildings are all in bad shape; there is no lab equipment. In Rivers State we have started to try to do something about this. The second aspect is the provision of the books; basic books are hard to get. The cost is so prohibitive. Many people cannot afford it, which leads them to try to share their books. That is not the way people should have to learn. The third factor, is this syndrome that somehow was introduced, whereby teachers' salaries were not paid promptly, and in some cases teachers had to go for several months with-

out pay. This has made teachers not take their teaching job seriously, so they now virtually do it as a part-time job, instead of a full-time job. Now, when you don't have the commitment of the teachers, definitely there is no way you can expect good education. So these three areas have got to be addressed concurrently. That's why I recently advised authors that each person ought to write in his field, especially in areas that contribute to the education and development of our people as a whole. For instance, if you are a mathematician, can you not produce a basic mathematics book?

EIR: At the beginning of the phase of independence, there was the idea of very rapid economic development, and the former colonies very rapidly assuming a role that would give them equal status with all other nations in the world. We have seen in the 1970s and '80s, under the debt crisis, under the IMF policies, a deterioration of the economic and political situation, especially in Africa. Today there are people in the West who virtually have written off development, especially for Africa. Against this, what would your vision of Nigeria, your vision of West Africa be, and what do you think is the real potential for development of this nation?

Komo: To start with, we certainly have a real potential for development here. You have to remember that in many cases, the African leaders who took over from the colonial masters were picked by them. The colonial masters virtually picked people whom they wanted to take over from them. So really, you had leaders that were not leaders because they had the leadership aptitude to be leaders. They were not prepared to lead their nations anywhere.

The second thing is the connivance, again by the same western countries, to directly assist these inept leaders by looting the little things we have here, the little treasures that we have in Africa, to western banks. It is not a secret that, not even counting what is in the United States or other places, if Nigeria's total money that is in the U.K. alone were to be brought back to Nigeria, it would pay all our debt and we would still be in a position to leap forward, faster than you could ever imagine. We have made numerous requests: Why not just publish the names of those people and let us know of their accounts? In any case, the World Bank and even the western people who are accusing us of all this, if they are concerned, why not get these banks to return this money? They can do that, or at least, if nothing else, why not directly convert this money to pay the debts, so that we can be free to use what we are generating now to develop ourselves?

I think it is just not good enough to sit down and tell us that we have virtually no hope of developing, when, on the one hand, the same people passing such judgment have connived and have been instrumental in the mess we are in, in the first place. I am convinced that it is only a matter of time: we *will* have the leadership, with the aptitude and commitment that will ensure that we use what we have properly, to get us where we ought to be.