

U.S. Senate hearings fail to force stronger 'Nigeria-bashing' actions

by Lydia Cherry

The purpose of the May 15 U.S. Senate hearings on Nigeria had been widely articulated by self-proclaimed human rights groups, as well as staffers of Nancy Kassebaum (R-Kans.), who chairs the African Affairs Subcommittee. The plan was to put the Clinton administration "on the spot" to take strong action against Nigeria; the plan failed. Testifying before the subcommittee, Undersecretary of State Peter Tarnoff had absolutely no new initiatives to offer, a fact that was not surprising, since the Clinton administration had reportedly told Senator Kassebaum that the hearing was premature.

The hearings, according to Tim Trinkle from Kassebaum's office, had been partially to determine if the legislation that had been introduced last November, calling for additional sanctions against Nigeria, should move ahead. Kassebaum's Nigeria Democracy Act, among other measures, calls for freezing the assets of Nigerian leaders, and would prohibit new American investment in Nigeria. To no big surprise, the *New York Times*, in an editorial one week prior to the hearings, strongly supported the Nigeria Democracy Act, and particularly the what the *Times* declared the "most potent" aspect of it—prohibiting new American investment in Nigeria.

Although the usual spokesmen from U.S. and British think-tanks and human rights groups also testified—spewing out the anti-Nigerian line of their common funders—there were also thoughtful presentations made by organizations and individuals *that have actual constituencies*, excerpted below. Of these statements, those of Sen. Carol Moseley-Braun (D-Ill.) and Rep. William J. Jefferson (D-La.)—both senior members of the Black Caucus—were particularly interesting, in light of the fact that Black Caucus chairman Donald Payne (D-N.J.) strongly supports the Kassebaum hard-line legislation against Nigeria.

Clearly, the subject of Nigeria, and some of the economic policy ramifications that are very much a part of the Nigeria story, are succeeding in shaking the human rights dogmas that have been bought "hook, line, and sinker" by much of the U.S. Congress.

The written testimony of Lawrence Freeman from the Schiller Institute, which traced how the operation against Ni-

geria, point-by-point, was coordinated out of London, was distributed to all attendees.

Undersecretary of State for Political Affairs Peter Tarnoff

I welcome the opportunity to appear before the committee to discuss our policy objectives towards Nigeria. We cannot ignore Nigeria's size, population and influence in Africa. Its capacity to influence the West Africa region is significant. Our principal interest remains to have a stable, democratic Nigeria with which the U.S. can pursue productive cooperative relations. We do not wish to see Nigeria become a pariah state. . . .

An international consensus is developing, however, that the situation within Nigeria, especially regarding the transition to civilian government and respect for human rights, is serious and continues to deteriorate. . . .

Meanwhile, a humanitarian tragedy of great proportion has been unleashed in Liberia. Nigeria has been an important player in past attempts to bring peace to Liberia, and we have every reason to believe that it will continue to play a significant role in resolving the present crisis in Liberia. Nigeria contributes approximately 80% of the troops to the largely self-supporting West African peacekeeping force, ECOMOG. In addition, Nigeria was instrumental in brokering the Abuja Peace Accord in August 1995. Although the Abuja peace process has been sorely tested by over a month of death and destruction perpetrated by factional fighters, we maintain that the Abuja framework represents Liberia's best hope for a lasting peace. We will continue to work in partnership with Liberia's neighboring countries—including Nigeria—and others in the international community to restore peace in Liberia. . . .

In closing, let me say that we will continue to stress the overriding importance of respect for human rights in our bilateral relations with Nigeria. We will continue to press for a credible transition process built on the active and inclusive participation of the Nigerian people. We will press for a genuine dialogue with the government of Nigeria.

We will continue to consult with the international comm-

munity on new collective measures. . . . However, any new action will be much more meaningful once a consensus is developed. All options, including those contained in pending legislative proposals in your bill and in Congressman Payne's bill, remain on the table. . . .

**Ambassador David C. Miller,
president, Corporate Council on Africa**

It is a great pleasure to be invited to appear before you as a representative of the Corporate Council on Africa. As you may know, the Corporate Council on Africa is a private, non-profit organization, composed of approximately 90 American corporations and individuals who came together in 1993 to promote the growth of the private sector in Africa. . . .

The late secretary of commerce, Ron Brown, well understood that a growing economy was the cornerstone of both political stability and democratic progress. In his many visits to African countries, as well as to his fateful mission to Bosnia, Secretary Brown underscored the necessity of a growing economy to the building of what he called a functioning civil society. Secretary Brown understood, for Bosnia as well as for Africa, that making a transition to democracy is much more likely to succeed when it is founded on an economy which provides the citizenry with basic human needs, jobs, and some hope for a better future. . . .

U.S. business has little expertise in the details of democratic transitions or constitutional structures, but we believe that U.S. companies can make a positive contribution by strengthening the Nigerian economy, the base upon which a "functioning civil society" and any new democratic government must inevitably rise. . . .

Nigeria's oil production of approximately 2 million barrels per day earns the government approximately \$17 million, or about 80% of budgetary revenues. This is a substantial sum, but when spread over a population of over 100 million it equates to less than 17¢ per day for every Nigerian. No country can be expected to meet the health, educational, and infrastructural needs of its citizens on 17¢ per day. Clearly, Nigeria must make quick progress toward diversifying and expanding its economy. . . .

Madam Chairman, as much as we wish Nigeria's history might have taken a more peaceful and democratic course, we are even more concerned over Nigeria's future. With due respect to some of my colleagues, we believe the problem is substantially more profound than the duration of a transition plan or even the prospects of individual politicians. The core challenge facing Nigeria is the creation of a civil society capable of effectively governing the country and an economic infrastructure capable of providing the means for Nigerians to avoid a fate as a "failed state" and to achieve their potential as a leader of Africa. . . .

Many of our members, with extensive experience in Nigeria and elsewhere, seriously question whether sanctions

would actually have the effect its advocates intend. . . . In South Africa, international economic pressure—coupled with a strong internal opposition movement—clearly did compel the enfranchised whites to institute the necessary political changes. However, most of these elements are clearly missing from the Nigerian equation. . . .

America has a massive stake in Nigeria's ultimate success. Politically and economically, Nigeria is the linchpin of West Africa. . . . The members of the Corporate Council on Africa strongly believe that the policies we pursue toward Nigeria should be carefully crafted to move us toward the goals we seek, not propel us toward the fate we are trying to avoid. Simply put, it is hard to imagine how measures such as economic sanctions, which further stifle economic growth and drive one of the world's 20 poorest countries deeper into poverty and hopelessness can be a stimulus for a successful political transition to democracy and prosperity. . . .

Rep. William J. Jefferson (D-La.)

There is agreement that the Nov. 10, 1995 hanging of Ken Saro-Wiwa and eight others was deplorable. There is also widespread agreement that Nigeria continues a history of engaging in egregious human rights violation that merit our disdain and diplomatic pressure for change. But the question before us is larger than these issues, and it must be dealt with in spite of them. The question before us as American lawmakers is what role can we assist America helping the Nigerian people to achieve a stable democracy. . . .

It is a question made more complex in the creation of the nations of Africa, and particularly Nigeria. The 1884-85 Conference of Berlin, where Europeans carved up the continent lumping diverse ethnic and tribal groups together, has resulted in what some observers have called a frailty in African nations to adapt to western-style, winner-take-all democracies. The fear of ethnic domination in Nigeria, and largest and most diverse of all the nations in Africa, is real and deep rooted.

Thus, if we are to be of help to the Nigerian people in achieving democracy, it must be through America's support of a form of democracy of the Nigerian people's choosing and that takes into account their peculiar ethnic and cultural complexities and that affords a sufficient timetable to work through them.

Madam Chairwoman, I do not arrive at the question that I have posited here except after long experience with Nigeria. In the last 18 years, I have visited Nigeria more than 15 times. . . . I have met with General Abacha at least three times; and with other government leaders; with Mr. Abiola in detention; with Mrs. Abiola and labor and opposition leaders while in Nigeria; and I have been able, on several occasions, to confer extensively with conferees to Nigeria's most recent constitutional conference.

Additionally, I have worked closely with Members of

Congress and of the administration on Nigeria. Finally, when Mr. Abiola apparently won the election for President of Nigeria in 1993, no one worked harder in the Congress, than did I, to have our government recognize and support his election.

Thus, I come to this hearing today, with as much direct experience with Nigeria over a larger period as any Member of Congress. And, I come with the firm conclusion, that a policy of U.S. ostracism and sanctions toward Nigeria will not work to bring a stable democracy to Nigeria; and that a politically and economically disrupted Nigeria could further destabilize the already fragile West African region. . . .

The March 16 election—albeit imperfect—was an important symbolic step. From all accounts, including accounts from our own Embassy—the overwhelming majority of Nigerians came out to vote, despite calls for a boycott. . . . This is a signal we dare not miss. Can the U.S. really afford to introduce measures that will destabilize Nigeria in the middle of its elections?

Mr. Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes once remarked, in speaking of the obviousness of unfairness, “even a dog knows the difference between being stumbled over and being kicked.” With its history of unfair treatment, certainly black Africa knows the difference when it is kicked, and certainly Nigeria does. Thus self-righteous demonizing of Nigerian leaders . . . destroys any credibility the U.S. may have to serve as an effective advocate for democracy with the Nigerian government.

I recommend: 1) That the U.S. remove its objection to the three-year timetable of the Nigerians for transition to democracy. . . . 2) That the U.S. invest human and capital resources, directly and indirectly, to help make the transition successful. . . . 3) That we refrain from the imposition of or even talk of further sanctions against Nigeria. 4) That we engage the Nigerian leadership in a dialogue, not a match of threats, to negotiate the release of political opposition leaders. . . . 5) That we sponsor a summit in Washington, D.C. between Nigerian leaders and Nigerians at all levels to pursue plans for democratization. 6) That we promptly resolve the Nigerian airport issues so that flights from the U.S. to Lagos may be restored; 7) That we agree to remove visa restrictions on Nigeria’s government leaders, to permit them to travel to the U.S. and travel as necessary in the U.S. to further the goal of democracy. 8) That we accelerate review of drug-trafficking certification issues; giving Nigeria assistance and guidance in adopting and enforcing a drug abatement program that can lead to Nigeria’s de-listing by the U.S. as one of the nations failing to cooperate toward stemming drug importation into the U.S. . . .

Sen. Carol Moseley-Braun (D-Ill.)

I am testifying in behalf of democracy in Nigeria. I am testifying in behalf of consistency and fairness in U.S. foreign

policy. I am testifying against this legislation, and against second-class world citizenship for Nigeria. . . .

As the only American of African descent to serve in the Senate, I have a personal as well as a philosophical and policy interest in policy towards Africa. . . . I would argue strenuously that our foreign policy should reflect our values, and that the promotion of democracy and advocacy for human rights are, or should be, essential elements of our policy.

I fear, however, that this legislation does neither, and instead of serving to advance those goals, will only serve to retard them, and to further isolate and even destabilize Nigeria specifically and Western Africa generally. Most importantly, this bill serves to detract from our ability to advance those objectives, worldwide, by pointing out inconsistency and indeed hypocrisy in regards to matters about which we must be consistent, and clear and cogent. . . .

Our devotion to democracy must be a goal, although as a political objective, democracy is more dependent on the history and culture and political environment. Democracy in Africa is barely 40 years old; in this country, it is over 200 years old, even so, women achieved the vote here 75 years ago, and African Americans just in our lifetime. . . .

Sanctions, and particularly the unilateral sanctions proposed in this bill, serve not to engage, but to isolate, not to initiate or continue constructive dialogue, but to stop it. It is for that reason that I urge this committee to consider carefully the implications of the approach suggested here. Additional sanctions are unlikely to result in the removal of the current regime in favor of another. And even if that did happen what has been achieved? Such crass political muscle should not be dignified by reference to promotion of human rights. . . .

Our relations in Africa are changing, in no small part due to the collapse of communism. But as we begin to define the determinants of those relations, I hope that our commitment to fairness and engagement and dialogue are not made victims of our desire to make examples out of nations just because we have no other contradictory interests, or just because we can. . . .

Lawrence Freeman, Schiller Institute

If the stated concern of this committee is “to encourage a peaceful transition to a democratic, stable, and prosperous” Nigeria, then its first action should be to call for an immediate halt to Britain’s constant efforts to destabilize the Nigerian nation, and to reject all legislation advocating sanctions against Nigeria.

From the moment that General Abacha became head of state on Nov. 17, 1993, at the request of leaders from every political group in the country, Nigeria has been the target of deployments emanating from London, aimed at causing the struggling nation to disintegrate into ethnic warfare. It has been the impulse of General Abacha to maintain the integrity of Nigeria as a nation-state, above competing “ethnic inter-

ests,” to use Nigeria’s natural resources for economic development; and to resist IMF [International Monetary Fund] programs aimed at crippling Nigeria’s economy.

The British Commonwealth, which still acts to enforce the colonial policies of the British Empire, intends to prevent any sub-Saharan African nation from becoming truly independent and economically sovereign. Thus, Baroness Caroline Cox, member of the House of Lords; and Baroness Lynda Chalker, of the Office of Overseas Development (previously the Colonial Office) have been deployed against Sudan and Nigeria, respectively.

Nigeria and Sudan together with South Africa are the nations of sub-Saharan Africa, that are key to all of Africa. If these three countries were to be destroyed, Africa would be under the direct control of the British oligarchy through its various tentacles like ITT, Royal Dutch Shell, De Beers, Imperial Chemical Industries, Unilever-United Africa Co., and Barclays Bank. These raw material-trading cartels would turn Africa into a gigantic slave-labor looting plantation, capable of sustaining life for only a few tens of millions of Africans. The rest of the population would simply “disappear” as the result of famine, disease, increased rates of infant mortality, lack of health care, and tribal-ethnic warfare.

All the deployed destabilizations against Nigeria since General Abacha assumed leadership have come from the same place: London.

- **Moshood Abiola** made his fortune through the good graces of ITT, and bought the presidential candidacy of the Social Democratic Party only several weeks before the election. After General Babangida (not General Abacha) cancelled the June 12, 1993 elections [they were stopped while in progress—ed.], Abiola made several trips to London. In 1994, he decided that he wanted to become President, and was eventually arrested for treason after declaring himself the head of the country. . . . Interestingly, Abiola personally had asked General Abacha to assume leadership of Nigeria and only turned against Nigeria and General Abacha when General Abacha refused to turn the government over to him. The June-July 1994 strikes and labor disruptions, that were funded in part by Abiola, in an attempt to force the collapse of the government, included among their “labor” demands that the Nigerian government pay almost \$1 billion to the Shell Oil Company.

- **Bolaji Akinyemi** heads the National Democratic Coalition (Nadeco), which has supported Abiola’s attacks on General Abacha, and is the most public arm of the British-controlled opposition groups. Akinyemi is married to a British national, lives in London, and was the foreign minister from 1986-90 during the pro-IMF regime of Babangida. Akinyemi, like his friend Abiola, personally requested that General Abacha assume the position of head of state in 1993, and did so publicly in a paid newspaper advertisement. When General Abacha failed to reward him with a minister’s post, he joined the opposition. Akinyemi and Nadeco have been

guided and supported by Lynda Chalker and according to Nigerian sources, after Abiola funds ran out, have been financed by Chalker’s friends in the City of London.

- **Olusegun Obasanjo**, a former Nigerian head of state, was arrested on charges of plotting a coup against Abacha in March 1995. He has been a board member of the multibillion-dollar Ford Foundation, and is connected to London’s Royal Institute of International Affairs (Chatham House). Obasanjo, before he was arrested, was to be a featured speaker at a Chatham House conference in London on March 29, on “Britain in the World,” alongside Lynda Chalker. The coup plot, hatched in London, was to have Obasanjo fly from this Chatham House conference, whose speakers included Henry Kissinger and the Prince of Wales, to Nigeria to assume control of the government following the planned assassination of General Abacha.

- **Randall Robinson**, executive director of TransAfrica has led the effort in Congress for sanctions against Nigeria. TransAfrica is a creation of the Ford Foundation and Council on Foreign Relations, two of the most prestigious and powerful U.S. based Anglo-American foundations.

- **Baroness Lynda Chalker** of Wallasey, Minister of Overseas Development—formerly known as the British Empire’s Colonial Office before Prime Minister’s Macmillan’s “Winds of Change”—is the individual assigned responsibility by the British Commonwealth to bring down General Abacha and dismember the nation of Nigeria. Every Nigerian opposition movement is controlled by Chalker, in one way or another.

- **Ken Saro-Wiwa**, before his death, led a London-funded and -orchestrated movement to precipitate the breakup of Nigeria into various competing “micro-ethnic groups.” The idea for a separate “Ogoniland” was an artificial creation of Amnesty International, Greenpeace, and the Unrepresented Nations and People Organizations (UNPO), with the support of Prince Philip’s World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) and Royal Dutch Shell. Heavy financial support also came from the Body Shop International, whose chairman, Gordon Rodwick, has been Prince Charles’s polo partner since their school days. . . .

Primarily, through the IMF structural adjustment programs during the Babangida regime, the Nigerian economy was destroyed. Today Nigeria needs help to economically support its population. It is in the vital self-interest of the U.S. to design and support policies that will help the growth of Nigeria’s agricultural and industrial sectors. When the British formally pulled out of Nigeria, one thing that they did not leave behind was infrastructure. Nigeria is in great need of massive construction of railroads, inland waterway transportation, irrigation, and electrical power stations. The rate of increase in per capita and per hectare production in agriculture and industry depends on the level of advanced infrastructure in these and related areas. This cannot be done unless Nigeria’s enormous debt burden is alleviated.