

Nigeria's transition to civilian rule

Africa's most populous nation is heading for elections, and is determined to achieve economic progress for its people. Lawrence K. Freeman reports.

Nigeria is now in the final phase of a three-year transition process to civilian rule. On Oct. 1, 1998, a newly elected President of Nigeria is to take office. The return to civilian rule of the most populated nation in Africa, of 104 million people, is the substance of the two interviews here, with Chief S.K. Dagogo-Jack, chairman of the National Electoral Commission of Nigeria (NECON), and Justice Mamman Nasir, chairman of the Transition Implementation Committee (TIC). These two individuals have leading responsibility for carrying out the plans of the transition, first announced by Head of State Gen. Sani Abacha on Oct. 1, 1995.

The initiation of the move toward civilian rule followed the recommendations of the delegated Constitutional Conference, which met in Abuja during 1994-95 to write a new constitution for Nigeria (see *EIR*, Dec. 16, 1994). Justice Nasir and the TIC have overall responsibility to implement the decisions of the Constitutional Conference in supervising the entire transition process.

NECON's responsibility is to oversee all matters pertain-

ing to the parties and the elections. After the inauguration of NECON in December 1995, it immediately established very demanding and detailed guidelines for the creation of new parties. In order to ensure that these new parties were broad-based and representative of the entire population, they had to acquire 40,000 signatures in each of the states, and 15,000 in the capital, Abuja. Ultimately, five parties met the requirements by the prescribed timetable, and they are in the process of fielding candidates for local, state, and federal offices. The parties engaged in the elections are: the United Nigerian Congress Party (UNCP), the Congress for National Consensus (CNC), the National Center Party of Nigeria (NCPN), the Democratic Party of Nigeria (DPN), and the Grassroot Democratic Movement (GDM).

Chief Dagogo-Jack reports that the process is already a success, and is optimistic about the transition to civilian rule later on this year. "You see, we Nigerians, are not skeptical about the transition program," he said. "We are steaming up, full steam ahead." NECON also has responsibility for regis-



Lawrence Freeman interviews S.K. Chief Dagogo-Jack, chairman of the National Election Commission of Nigeria, in Abuja. "I can assure you," said Chief Dagogo-Jack, "that come Oct. 1, 1998, Nigeria will definitely have a democratically elected civilian President. And, we will not fail. We are determined and proud people."

tering Nigerians for the elections, and so far has registered 57 million, almost 55% of the total population. Participation in the March 1997 local government elections varied from 52% to 60% of registered voters. (Both figures are higher than voter turnout in U.S. elections.) Reports received by *EIR* indicate that the Dec. 6, 1997 elections for State Assembly were successful.

The final year of elections

What remains is the final year of elections. The revised 1998 timetable for the last phase of the transition process includes: February, party primaries for nomination of candidates for the National Assembly; March, filing of nominating papers for the National Assembly elections; April 25, National Assembly elections; June, party primaries, and filing of nominating papers for state governors and Presidential elections; Aug. 1, state governors and Presidential elections; Sept. 21, swearing-in of elected state governors, and inauguration of State House of Assembly; Oct. 1, swearing-in of President, and inauguration of the National Assembly.

Democracy by itself does not solve the main problems facing Nigeria, which Justice Nasir correctly says are economic development and education—issues addressed below (p. 62), in a speech by Sam Aluko, professor of economics and chairman of the National Economic Intelligence Committee. However, Justice Nasir ridicules the negativity by the West toward Nigeria: “I always tell the Nigerian press, like I’m telling these people of weaker minds: Don’t think negative. . . . We are doing this in the interest of our nation.”

Interview: Justice Mamman Nasir

‘We hope the United States will be fair’

Justice Mamman Nasir is chairman of Nigeria’s Transition Implementation Committee. He was interviewed by Lawrence Freeman, on Oct. 28, 1997.

EIR: Justice Nasir, you now are chairman of the Transition Implementation Committee, which is overseeing the transition to a democracy and elections in Nigeria. Could you tell us what your responsibilities are?

Nasir: The whole idea of the Transition Implementation Committee is to see that the government is implementing the decisions of the Constitutional Conference. Because the Constitutional Conference recommended so many things to

do in respect to economy, social services, and politics. And as far as we have been able to follow, a lot has been achieved.

EIR: Specifically, what has been achieved in the first two years of the transition process? What has been accomplished in Nigeria?

Nasir: On the political scene, we have held two elections, and we have prepared the ground for the next set of elections: Houses of Assembly, National Assembly, and, ultimately, the Presidential and the governorship election.

In the economic field, we have succeeded in arresting the downflow of our economy. For example, we have started stabilizing the naira [Nigeria’s currency]. And, we have started getting some of our businesses back. We have tried to arrest the downfall and substandard aspects of the economy. For example, in showing the nation that whoever decides to be dishonest, government will pursue that dishonesty and recoup the property lost or stolen; it does not matter whose property it is, it will go back to the correct owner. Like the banking sector: The money being recovered is not government money; it is Nigeria’s money; it is Nigeria’s economy. So, we are doing that, absolutely successfully. We have succeeded! You must have been told this by Finance, that our budgeting system has improved; the business community is now a bit happier, in fact much happier, with what has so far been achieved.

In the social sector, I was telling you about the railways, the hospitals, and so on.

EIR: There is 11 months left until the transition to a civilian President taking over in Nigeria. What do you think is going to happen, to guarantee the success of this transition?

Nasir: The first thing one should look at, is, from a state where the nation would have gone to pieces, we are now at a state where the nation is going up, with stability. And, as far as we have been able to trace, this stability will continue, and there is *no reason whatsoever* to believe otherwise. So, the next—in fact, under 11 months—because after August everything is known. By the first week of August, we hope everybody will know every governor, and the President. So, within that period, the economy, the other aspects of transition, would continue. The political one would come to fruition by the end of August.

EIR: When are the Presidential elections?

Nasir: Aug. 1, 1998.

EIR: Then when does the Presidency take over?

Nasir: Oct. 1.

EIR: Now, many people in the West are dismissing these elections, saying that they are a subterfuge; they are not real; this is Nigerians buying time. As head of the Transition Committee, what can you tell the naysayers? What can you tell