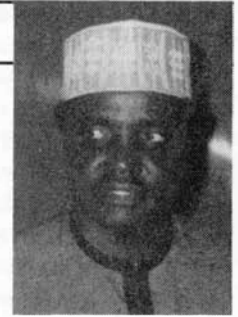

Interview: Col. Lawal Jafaru Isa



Time is needed for democracy to take shape in Nigeria

Colonel Isa, the administrator-governor of the Nigerian state of Kaduna, was interviewed on July 4.

EIR: Could you tell us something about the state of Kaduna and its importance for the country?

Isa: Kaduna is centrally located in the geography of Nigeria. By virtue of its geographical location, it is like a melting pot—it has all tribes and ethnic groups that you can find in the totality of the country. It is mainly agricultural, but we also have agro-allied industries, textiles, and one of the major refineries in the country.

EIR: You said that in Kaduna there are different ethnic groups working together—without the kind of conflicts portrayed sometimes by the West?

Isa: I would not say there have never been problems; there were problems that began around 1987. But all indications are that much of the discord that had existed, had been the creation of some few individuals, some few elites actually, who seem to have concluded that by adopting the policy of “divide and rule,” they would be able to maintain their hold on power, their relevancy, in the system as a whole. But the majority of the people are very tolerant of one another. Since I became governor, I’ve tried to ensure that they have been able to come together even closer.

But with respect to these earlier problems: The most terrible one was what took place in May 1992, in which there were a lot of killings. This started from a particular area called Zangon-Kataf, which is a local government. This was supposed to be intra-religious, an intra-tribal kind of violence that took place. But as I referred to earlier, the *entire* crises and entire intolerance had actually been created by some few individuals, and once these few individuals had been removed from positions of influence, Kaduna has been one of the most peaceful parts of Nigeria.

EIR: Regarding the constitutional convention that has just begun in Nigeria, some of the press here in Nigeria, and also much of the press abroad, are attacking it, saying it is not real; that these are old-line politicians just being brought

back in. Do you think this is a serious process?

Isa: Perhaps the best way to look at this issue is to ask the simple question: The issue of a national constitutional conference, how did it come about? If one would recall even last year, at about this time last year, the same people who are kicking against the national constitutional conference now, were the ones who earlier said that except for such a conference, the question of moving the country forward is impossible. It was their earlier idea. Now that the government has accepted that, and is making every effort for the conference to take place, the same people have gone back on their words, and say: “It is a sham.”

EIR: There is often talk about so-called mismanagement of economic affairs in countries such as Nigeria in the western press. Nigeria is for sure going through difficult economic times; we are aware that there recently was a fuel crisis, and that you took some measures in your state to overcome it. Could you describe that and what the result of it was?

Isa: It is easy for this kind of comment to be made, that the economy in developing countries, including Nigeria, is being mismanaged. Sometimes it is true. But we have peculiar problems which I believe the world should be aware of. We all know that Nigeria’s economy is very undeveloped. The avenues for making a living here are very much restricted. Unlike the developed countries, up to now we have not been able to adopt or build up the culture to go along with the explosion of population. Because of the lack of development, what has happened is that whatever avenue that is open, people are likely to take it, because they have to survive anyway. That is my impression of what happened with the fuel crisis.

I believe that Nigeria is now the foremost importer of used vehicles of any country in the world, and all these vehicles require fuel to move. Our population is not what it used to be 10 years ago. What this has resulted in, is a scarcity of supply of fuel. Some Nigerians, in trying to make a living perhaps, began diverting the fuel that is made available and subsidized by the federal government. Though this is unfortunate, it has been through this mechanism that,

at times, they were perhaps able to support themselves and their families. This could happen in any country. It is simple economics—where the supply is much lower than the demand.

When I first reported for duty as governor of Kaduna state, I met up with this problem on the ground, and I decided to go about finding out what had actually led to it. It was very clear to my mind that the supply was much lower than we would require in this state. But then, the little that was being supplied was being diverted. So what I started to do, was to talk to the officials from the NNPC [Nigerian National Petroleum Co.] themselves, the fuel tank car drivers, the petrol dealers, and so on. But because they obviously were making extra money, they were not prepared to come out and tell me the truth. I think I had about 10 meetings with them. It was by the 11th meeting that it became very clear what was going on. I decided the only thing for me to do was to personally ensure that whatever fuel had been allocated to Kaduna state, actually got to the various filling stations in the state. And that was all I did.

So we sat down again, and I was told what we were entitled to in Kaduna. I said, "Fine, that will give me how many trucks?" They told me how many trucks. I told the NNPC that what I wanted them to do was to make sure that they got the fuel into the tankers, and that they then keep them for me, and I would come there, and check and ensure that this is what I am entitled to.

Having done this, from there, I went with my senior staff and we earmarked filling stations that would take up this fuel, and we escorted these trucks physically to these filling stations and ensured that it was discharged in the filling station. Because after discharging it, it would be difficult for the fuel to be pumped out and then sold again.

Because, you see, what had happened before, was that after the NNPC deployed the trucks, sometimes the fuel went as far as the neighboring country, Niger, sometimes to the republic of Benin—going to the black market and so on. But once we started escorting these trucks to the filling stations, we found that the fuel was nearly enough in this state. Still, it is not the quantity we actually need, because if we have a slack problem in a day, we would have to start over again. But we now are far more comfortable than other states, in the north also. But the key is that we monitor it.

EIR: Do you think that Nigeria will be moving toward democracy in 1995, as the western press terms it, at the end of this constitutional convention process?

Isa: I have no doubt in my mind.

I decided to be in the military, not because I lacked the intellectual capacity to go into whatever field I chose to go in. I went into the military because I saw it as a noble profession. But unfortunately, particularly during the last two years, we have seen the military being dragged in the

mud. It was the first experience we ever had in this country, whereby the word of the soldier was not honored.

People have had something to point to as their reason for being cynical about this process leading to democracy. [During the last year of the Babangida military government], the entire electoral processes in the country—right from the local government, the state, the senate, the House of Representatives—were successfully conducted. The only one that kept on shifting was the presidential election; it kept on shifting and dates kept being changed. . . .

The problem with most developing countries—Nigeria inclusive—is that we do not even have an idea of why we are together. We don't even know why. We know what the basis for unity is in the United Kingdom; we know what it is in America; we know what it is in France. But when these respective countries were evolving their democracy, they didn't have the referees that we now have. Now the developed countries inevitably say: "No, no, stop it, that is not how it should be done; you do it this way."

We need time; we need encouragement for us to develop fully. You cannot talk about democracy when you just pay attention to a few people you can count on your fingertips and say: This is how it must go.

Jesse Jackson takes bankers' line on Nigeria

Jesse Jackson, the Clinton administration's special envoy to Nigeria, told the BBC on July 29 that should Nigeria's internal political crisis not be resolved, the United States should consider imposing sanctions and freezing the assets of Nigeria's military rulers.

The BBC interviewer expressed surprise that Jackson was willing to go so far, and then interviewed Rep. Harry Johnston (D-Fla.), a member of the U.S. House Foreign Affairs Committee, who said that such measures would be too harsh, for the present. What has to be worked out is the release of political detainees, as well as the "peaceful transfer of power." Should such approaches not work, however, the U.S. government should be prepared to go to the International Monetary Fund and World Bank, and insist on a freeze of all lending to Nigeria. At that point, the measures mentioned by Jackson could be considered. But things should stop short of a break in diplomatic relations. "I don't want to sound mercenary, but we need the oil," said Johnston.