

Airport workers ask all returning travelers: "What did you bring for me?" Court documents cannot be filed without bribes. Contracts are padded to grotesque levels. Dishonesty is endemic and is a symptom of malaise in a society which has so little hope. Another symptom is the growth of "miracle churches" and ritual killings, especially associated with election campaigns. Crime fighting initiatives involve grave infractions of human rights. Education is on the decline. Nigerian university degrees are less and less recognized internationally. Schools are closing and the quality of teaching is declining. Many Nigerians patronize traditional doctors because they cannot afford medical clinics. The immunization program has collapsed. Infant mortality is high. As much as 70% of the prescription drugs in circulation are fake or expired. AIDS is a disaster waiting to happen. The numbers of medical doctors leaving Nigeria is alarming: a recent conference of ex patriot Nigerian doctors in the United States drew 4,000 delegates.

Political

The Constitution is not well known and it is not easy even to obtain a copy of it in Nigeria. The government prefers that it not be available, because they intend to continue to shift the goalposts. The transition program has become a disguise for the consolidation of the military regime of General Abacha as it becomes increasingly evident that he intends to succeed himself, as President. But there are difficulties in his way:

- the issue of political prisoners
- Abiola's increasing stature
- the absolute failure of his economic program
- the careless handling of the local government elections
- an awakening by many churches to the dangers of the present situation
- political parties' (with some exceptions) failure to address the real issues and
- the lack of preparation by the military to live under any kind of civilian rule (no mental preparation for subjecting themselves to the rule of law).

Human rights

The government has breached every one of the civil rights guaranteed by the Constitution. Those arrested for the 1990 alleged coup plot are still detained. President-elect Abiola, the Ogoni 19, labour leaders, alleged bomb plotters, and many others are in jail without trial. Relatives of those who have gone overseas are picked up. Journalists are being arrested less often, but are still being harassed.

Reason for hope

There is reason for hope. Pro-democracy groups came together in 1995 for an all-Nigeria summit on human rights: this led to formation of the United Action for Democracy (UAD), which facilitates unity amongst all these groups, including NADECO, the National Association of Democratic Lawyers, and individuals such as Chief Gani Fawehinmi, who had been outside NADECO. UAD was able to bring these participants together to mark Abiola's 60th birthday, and has been able to obtain consensus on many issues: release of political prisoners, end to military rule, and a government of national unity. If it is to be headed by Abiola, there must be convened a sovereign national conference.

In order to challenge Abacha's claim that he is doing a good job of running the country, UAD published a series of questions for Nigerians to ask themselves and got a good response from the public.