

#### IV. Assessing the Emergent Political Environment

Papers by Ms. Toun Ilumoka of the Empowerment and Action Research Center in Lagos, and Prof. Peter Ekeh of the S.U.N.Y. were presented.

Ms. Ilumoka's presentation was entitled "Assessing Civil Society after the Military: New Opportunities, Continuing Constraints". She discussed the concept of civil society, its development and its variants in Nigeria under the military rule of the Babangida and Abacha administrations. Initially, to combat the brutality of the state, very different kinds of groups amalgamated or formed coalitions to develop a common basic minimum program of action. However, because institutionalized groups such as workers, teachers and students had been deliberately weakened by the state, attempts to confront the military administrations were largely unsuccessful. Ms. Ilumoka suggested that civil society should go beyond mere reaction and opposition. It has to pro-actively articulate an agenda for social transformation. It must plan and strategize to respond effectively to the new administration. Therefore, as well as the military's disengagement from politics, the fundamental differences among the various civil society actors must be addressed. Ms. Ilumoka also noted the absence of established rules and enforcement procedures which could be implemented by a broad cross section of society and that the transition was being implemented without a constitution. How then will the new government be held accountable? She asked. Would it truly address the aspirations of the Nigerian people? What will be the role of civil society under the new civilian government? How effectively will groups be able to operate outside the framework of government institutions? All these questions underline the importance of research and agenda-setting institutions, the media and people's organizations, as well as the international community. Finally Ms. Ilumoka, among other things, raised the issue of a sovereign national conference and the development of a constitution that truly represents the democratic aspirations of the Nigerian people. These matters must be addressed, she emphasized. Also paramount are popular economic programs, which can generate support from the various sectors of Nigerian society, and massive investment in education, to strengthen Nigeria's culture of respect for human rights.

Prof. Ekeh offered comments on "Strengthening Democratic Representation in Nigeria: Constitutional Debates, Federalism and Resource Allocation". He provided historical background to the rise of Nigerian federalism, tracing its development from independence in 1960, through the Civil War, to a series of military regimes. Federalism as a logical response to Nigeria's unique make-up after independence was replaced over a period of time by centralized military