

Commonwealth, the suspension of Nigerian membership is not likely to be lifted unless there is a transition to an elected government. The coming October CMAG meeting may set out terms of Nigeria's possible re-acceptance into the Commonwealth and the Commonwealth's action plans for the 1999 Nigerian elections. Hopefully, any contribution to the elections will adopt the goal of enabling non-governmental and civil society mobilization and will apply strategic pressure on Abubakar and the Nigerian government to refrain from manipulating the electoral process.

Effective, credible election monitoring is of the greatest importance, especially the monitoring of many pre-election activities, not so much the polls themselves.

Canadian strategy

Canada's policy now needs to be revised. The Working Group on Nigeria (WGN) has discussed the following options.

Canada should set a longer-term framework for its policy objectives, linked neither exclusively to the presidential or other elections, nor exclusively to a May 1999 planned handover to a civilian government. The framework could have two phases. The first would encompass a transitional period to the point where power has been effectively handed over to democratically elected civilian authorities after May 29, 1999. The second would cover up to five years beyond the handover, and involve working with groups in Nigeria to shore up and secure democratic gains and enable key institutions to play an effective role in pursuit of continuing democratic rule.

During the transitional period, Canada must take an active part in building a new and strong international alliance around Nigeria and work with groups inside Nigeria to ensure the democratic transition takes place.

Canada must work with like-minded countries and like-minded NGOs, both within the Commonwealth and outside, to establish clear benchmarks for a genuine, open democratic transition. Current sanctions must stay in place until the full transition to civilian government is accomplished.

Canada must continue to speak out in international forums when there are continuing human rights issues in Nigeria. Canada must condemn human rights abuses by the prevailing military power. It must press for release of those in detention, a clearing out of the jails, and the release of those convicted and imprisoned by unfair trials and those charged with treason. [At the 55th session of the UN Commission on Human Rights in March and April 1999, on the resolution on Nigeria, Canada should call for the extension of the Special Rapporteur's mandate for another year and also call for continued visits to Nigeria by relevant thematic rapporteurs.]

All Canadian government efforts should be seen as, and be effective at, supporting progressive civil society groups and related democratic processes in Nigeria throughout the whole period from now up to and including the three stages of the elections, through the transfer of power, and beyond.

Canada must press for the removal of all Abacha decrees that thwart the democratic process.

Canada must press for the return of the army to its barracks.