

REPORT

Central to the discussion at the roundtable was the role Canada and other actors should and must play, whether on their own or within international fora such as the Commonwealth and the UN.

1. Elections

Canada's participation to the Nigerian electoral process is central to our efforts to bringing democracy in Nigeria. Participants raised the question as to if and when Canada should get involved in monitoring the presidential elections that should take place in August 1998 (preceded by the National Assembly elections in April). Although there were doubts on the Nigerian Government's willingness to see the elections monitored, it was raised that for Canada to be in a position to comment on the electoral process - which is expected to be short from being democratic - we have to be involved early in the process, whether through the Commonwealth or otherwise. When speaking of elections, criteria for them to be free and fair come to mind, and Canada should be involved in setting those out. Of course, if it far from being certain that the Nigerian Government will accept these criteria. We should also look at the possibility of the Nigerians monitoring the elections themselves. Notwithstanding, Canada and the International Community have to concert their efforts to compel the Nigerian Government to opening the democratic process to allow the population's participation in elections and in society in general. Canada will discuss the possibility of election monitoring and its own participation at the next CMAG meeting. Past experiences, such as Ghana, have shown however that dictatorial military governments have been elected after somehow free and fair elections. It is expected that General Abacha will not step down despite international pressure and will be a strong candidate at the election.

2. Commonwealth

The Commonwealth forum is perceived as one of the most important tool for the Canadian Government to bring change in Nigeria. However, some fear that due to political realities, the Commonwealth might not be in a position to take a strong stand on the situation in Nigeria, even after raising the possibility of expulsion from the Forum at the last CHOGM meeting. It is therefore essential for Canada and other Commonwealth members to join their efforts and present a common position, set benchmark and clear and unambiguous criteria to be met. This could force the Forum to using its influence in bringing a change in Nigeria. However, it is expected that many of the Commonwealth member will avoid taking any position. In taking a definite position, Canada has to take into account not only these elements, but also its bilateral relations with other countries of the International Community.