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The record on human rights has not improved despite efforts within the United Nations and the Commonwealth.

BACKGROUND

The United Nations Special Rapporteurs (on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions; and on the independence of judges and lawyers) concluded in reports released this year that the civilian judicial system has virtually ceased to exist; resources and jurisdiction has been transferred away from them to military tribunals. There is no appeal to the civilian courts from a decision of the tribunals even in the case of the death penalty. In a separate report the Special Rapporteur on torture stated he was unable to get any response from the Nigerian regime to the numerous allegations of torture.

This fall, the General Assembly passed, over Nigerian opposition and with Canadian support, a resolution expressing deep concern about violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms and called upon the regime to cooperate with the Special Rapporteurs to ensure the human rights of all Nigerians.

The Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group (CMAG) was established at the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in November. The purpose of CMAG is to encourage Nigeria, Sierra Leone and the Gambia to respect fully the principles of human rights and democracy outlined the Harare Declaration.

During 1996, international pressure on the Nigerian military regime to improve human rights has remained relatively constant. The Nigerian government's own three year 'Transitional Plan', with the ostensible goal of returning the country to civilian rule in 1998, is already behind schedule and lacks the support of the leaders of the opposition parties many of whom, like the winner of the 1993 elections Chief Moshood Abiola, are still in prison. Of the fifteen parties that applied for accreditation under the Transition Plan, only five were accepted. Nigerian non-governmental organizations (NGO) speak of repression directed at pro-democracy activists. There is a speculation that General Abacha, the leader of the present military regime, will stand as a presidential candidate.

The civilian courts that continue to exist in Nigeria are very underfunded. The majority of the many political prisoners do not receive a fair hearing and the number of such prisoners continues to rise. The regime regularly disregards rulings from the civilian courts and has abrogated the guarantees contained in the constitution that protect human rights. Judicial appointments are subject to the executive power of the regime.

There are continued reports of repression of the Ogoni people who live in the oil-rich Nigerian delta and who have protested this area's environmental degradation. Less is known about whether other ethnic, religious, or minority groups are especially targeted. Some Nigerian women's groups have suggested that they may enjoy greater political