

Nigeria Sanctions Roundtable
June 1998

A roundtable was held to discuss sanctions against Nigeria as an option of Canadian foreign policy should the situation in that country fail to improve, especially regarding political prisoners and other forms of political repression and human rights violations by the current regime. Above all, it was noted that sanctions should be designed to cause pain for the Nigerian political elite and to minimise the negative humanitarian consequences for innocent civilians. Possible routes of influence in this regard include Nigeria's dependence on imports of refined petroleum products and exports of crude oil. Likewise, the effectiveness of sanctions would be increased if balanced by "carrots" to reward positive changes. Some suggested "carrots" include the provision of relief aid and debt relief. Some possible sanctions include a ban on investment, restrictions on trade credits, a ban on the export of luxury goods, and targetted travel/visa restrictions.

At the same time, the potential effectiveness of sanctions may be tempered by the fact that members of the elite are in a better position to profit from sanctions. Furthermore, the co-operation of the UK and the US is necessary for sanctions to be effective, especially sanctions regarding the freezing of assets, the export of oil production equipment to Nigeria, air and land links to Nigeria, a comprehensive oil embargo, blocking hard currency transactions related to Nigeria's oil exports, and an embargo on importing refined petroleum products into Nigeria. A complicating factor in these efforts is France's interest in pursuing business in Nigeria and its opposition to any sanctions.

While the Commonwealth appears to be the most promising forum for concerted action against the Nigerian regime, firm action by the Commonwealth is not certain and other coalitions of states, which would include the US and the UK, need to be established.

Policy recommendations:

- Canada should initiate a study of the likely humanitarian impact of a possible oil export or gasoline import embargo against Nigeria.
- Canada should also study the structure of Nigeria's debt (when is it due, how much, and to whom is it owed) to determine whether the debt could be used to pressure the regime and to explore the idea that debt relief might serve as a positive incentive for change.