

Canada should, however, continue to react publicly and privately to the arrest of dissidents and the curtailing of community organizations, as well as continue to press for the release of political prisoners, but not in a way that would hamper programs in Cuba of such organizations as Oxfam. Canada should use the leverage available to it through trade, investment, tourism and general political approach to promote human rights improvements.

Cuba is the only formally non-democratic state in the Americas and should not be accorded more importance than it warrants in relation to major countries in Latin America on which Canadian foreign policy should be focused.

### **3. Africa: The Commonwealth and Nigeria:**

*Lead Speaker: Collins Babalola, Director, Common Cause Canada-Nigeria*

(Text)

#### **A Revised Canadian Government Strategy on Nigeria**

##### **The domestic context**

The death of General Sani Abacha in June 1998 has renewed hope for civilian politics in Nigeria. General Abubakar Abdulsalam, who succeeded as head of state, has announced the military will go back to the barracks on May 29, 1999.

Many prominent politicians, journalists, and trade unionists have been released from detention. Some military decrees that hamstrung the trade unions have been repealed. New transitional committees have been established and the previous committees and the elections conducted under their supervision and the previously registered political parties have been abolished.

Still, the death of Chief M.K.O. Abiola in detention and the refusal of the military regime to accept two key recommendations of the democratic opposition, the convening of the sovereign national conference, and formation of a government of national unity and reconciliation have cast doubts on the regime. Many political prisoners are still in detention, though apparently most have been released; many of the decrees used by the military to detain people are still in place.

##### **The international and Commonwealth context**

The international community has enthusiastically welcomed the General Abubakar regime. The UN, Commonwealth, and OAU secretaries-general have visited the country, as have representatives of important African countries such as South Africa. The Canadian Secretary of State for Africa and Latin America, David Kilgour, was recently in Nigeria and met government leaders and representatives of a cross section of civil society. A new Canadian representative has been appointed to Nigeria; Canada's high commission, closed in 1997, officially for security reasons, may reopen soon.

Canada invested heavily in the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group (CMAG) but by June 1998 it had not produced effective results. Despite the renewed contacts between Nigeria and the