

Given the sweeping changes in Nigeria it is tempting to think that the respect for human rights manifested by the present military ruler is established and irreversible. There remains however cause for concern. Although the Head of State has indicated publicly his wish that decrees 2 and 9 be rescinded, the Inspector-General of Police has, likewise publicly, taken issue with this stand and the decrees remain in place. While almost all political prisoners have been released, several prominent people, allegedly involved in coup plots against General Abacha in 1995 and 1997, remain in detention. There is so far no established and agreed constitutional document to define the rights and duties of citizens and the relationship between governors and governed.

A serious test of the present Government's commitment to human rights will be its handling of the explosive situation in the oil-producing areas of Nigeria's southeast. There, the resentment of local peoples against the multinational oil companies and the central Nigerian government has often been manifested in violent protest. When this happened under Abacha it was harshly suppressed. Under the present government the local population is less fearful of the consequences of protest and there has been a series of violent incidents over the past months. The government is faced with a dilemma: It must keep order, and is under considerable pressure from the multinational oil companies to do so, but it cannot be seen, especially by the international community, to be quelling legitimate protest. So far the government has been moderate in the face of protest.

#### CANADIAN POSITION

Canada was a vocal critic of Nigeria, largely over its poor human rights record, during the Abacha regime. Now that the regime has changed for the better, Canada is anxious to help in ensuring that the present positive tendency continues throughout the life of the transitional government and is maintained and developed by the civilian administration which follows it. In that regard, Canada re-established its diplomatic presence in Nigeria in November 1998. As the most immediate concern is to promote a successful electoral process, Canada, through CIDA, has contributed or authorized \$1.25 million worth of assistance, in various forms and through both official and NGO channels, to this process.

CIDA is developing plans now for post-transition assistance and is likely to send a mission to Nigeria, shortly after the May 29 handover of power to the elected government, to further help in development of its plans.