

## Appendix D

### Remarks by the Director General, Africa Bureau, Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, Ms. Sandelle D. Scrimshaw at the conference

#### "Democratic Transition in Nigeria: Canadian Foreign Policy Options"

Ottawa, April 14-15, 1999

#### Background

Relations between Canada and Nigeria have traditionally been excellent. When Nigeria achieved independence in 1960 Canada rejoiced at its prospects. That great country seemed destined to be an example to all Africa of a functioning, prosperous democracy. We were the more pleased because Nigeria was a fellow member of the Commonwealth.

It was not long before hopes for Nigeria turned to concern. Civilian leaders appeared unable or unwilling to handle the responsibilities of government and senior military officers took over. As years went on, this became the rule rather than the exception. Matters went from bad to worse culminating in the several years of repressive and corrupt rule under General Abacha.

#### Current Situation

Now at last Nigeria has been given a new opportunity to rebuild itself. This enormous task is above all the responsibility of Nigerian government and its people. No one but they can bring about the changes of attitude required by the task of economic and political reconstruction and renewal.

Nigeria has vast material resources, important as building blocks for prosperity. More important still are the human resources that Nigeria possesses. Highly qualified professional people with experience and contacts in the world outside; a literacy rate, among both men and women, which compares favourably with those of some more prosperous countries are but a couple of examples.

#### Nigerian Priorities

As we see it, the most urgent task facing Nigeria's elected leaders is that of bringing these resources to bear on the desperate needs of the poor and middle classes. Their present poverty leads to a sense of despair which promotes instability and unrest in the country. These are the factors which in the past have tempted the military into intervention. They are the factors which place unmanageable burdens on the police and the judicial system. Despair, instability and unrest lead to that terrible affliction which so undermines Nigerian society, corruption.

Breaking from these social evils requires the rebuilding and the building anew of institutions. An electoral system which can minimize the kind of abuses that recently occurred; accountable legislative bodies at all levels; an effective judiciary; and, security services which balance efficiency with respect for individual rights are some that come to mind.