



REPORT FROM THE ROUNDTABLE ON NIGERIA

March 20, 2000
Ottawa

The Canadian Centre for Foreign Policy Development organised a Roundtable on Nigeria on March 20, 2000, in Ottawa. The roundtable brought together experts, academics, NGOs, Nigerians actively involved in the transformation process, as well as government officials, including the Director General of the Africa Bureau, Sandelle Scrimshaw. Ian Ferguson, the Canadian High Commissioner to Nigeria was able to join the roundtable by phone. Canada's former External Affairs Minister, the Hon. Flora MacDonald, also participated. The roundtable examined the current situation in Nigeria, assessed the progress of democratic reforms, examined the role of civil society in the transformation process and explored possible policy options for Canada.

1. Nigeria Today: Obstacles to Democratic Development

Steve Lee, opened the discussion by welcoming all to the roundtable. In particular, he thanked the Nigerian guests for making the great effort to come to Ottawa. The goal of the roundtable was to share information at a critical point of Nigeria's history and to think together about possible Canadian contributions to the continuing democratic transformation.

Following Steve Lee's remarks, Ian Ferguson, Canadian High Commissioner to Nigeria, briefly outlined the contemporary situation. He said that tensions remain high following the unrest in Kaduna and other parts of the country and the freeze on the further introduction of Sharia. In the case of the Odi community last December, the army was sent in to "resolve" a kidnaping and killing of police officers in the Odi community. The operation resulted in widespread destruction of property and hardship for the community. The President of Nigeria, Olusegun Obasanjo has apologized for the military action. Political and religious leaders are now reaching out to other groups. Incidents like this one are not new to Nigeria and the country is not disintegrating. Some NGOs are doing excellent work in conflict prevention and management. Nigeria's diversity, competition over scarce resources and poor governance are the major factors contributing to such outbreaks of violence. In a recent meeting with a Nigeria-Canada Business Group, the President was undaunted by the unrest and appeared confident. In another recent significant development, the President has taken over NEPA (Nigerian Electric Power Authority) to address acute power shortages.

President Obasanjo continues to merit support as he approaches his first anniversary in office. However, reforms, especially economic reforms, are slower than initially anticipated. This