

Nigerian Army is highly ethnicised and has similarly ethnicised the whole country. It has been impossible for it to organise a credible transition programme. The only apparently successful 1979 transition could not be sustained for more than four years. It is for this reason that the proposal was made that the army should hand over to a Government of National Unity (GNU) while the army returned to the barracks. The main job of the GNU is to convene a Sovereign National Conference (SNC) of representatives of all nationalities and other civil society actors where the multifarious problems of the country can be discussed and the basis of our co-existence can be negotiated and agreed. Elections will then follow based on the negotiated document.

It is no use asking how the GNU will be formed or who will lead it or what the composition will be. It is also no use asking the same questions about the SNC. It is the principle that matters. Chief M.K.O. Abiola, who had won an election with massive majorities in all parts of the country, the fairness of which no one disputed, was not allowed to take up his mandate. He was the best friend of both the military and the northern elite and a Moslem to boot. That singular event provided convincing evidence that the North was not willing to associate with other Nigerians on an equal basis. What it also did was to show that the Nigerian army is a northern army. Events since then, including the phantom coup of 1995, the nationality of most of those imprisoned or held under Decree 2 or those driven into exile or those set-up in the 1997 coup reinforce this view.

The death of Gen. Abacha, the apparent benevolence of Gen. Abubakar, the zoning of the presidency to the Southwest does not alter these facts. They are palliatives to impose solutions without negotiations or consultations with the other party. It is therefore unfortunate that that the series of elections arranged by Gen. Abubakar with all its imperfections is being applauded by the international community as a return to democracy.

### ***The Constitution***

Up till now, Nigeria does not have a constitution and Gen. Abubakar continues to run things on an ad-hoc basis. One area where the participation of the civil society in governance is crucial is certainly Constitution making because this lays down the basic rules under which all of us will live. It cannot be left to Gen. Abubakar as it was left to his military predecessors including Gen. Obasanjo in 1979. Usually when the military imposes the constitution, it decrees no-go areas that could not be debated in the Constituent Assembly and also reserve to themselves the final amendment and approval of the Constitution. Arranging a referendum appears to