

Appendix D

The International Development Research Centre has also quite recently sent a team to Nigeria in order to begin to identify areas where they or other Canadian agencies could be helpful. Support to research systems through such means as connectivity and better access to information were seen as important by the team. Matters of governance as well as natural resource management were also given high priority by the team.

We in the Canadian government recognize that constitutional issues are of great importance to Nigeria. To the extent that constitutional arrangements ensure an equitable distribution of wealth among Nigeria's regions and peoples, they are a vital factor. By ensuring that government is inclusive, that it reflects the will and protects the rights of all Nigerians and by clarifying the lines of authority within the body politic, the Constitution can help to encourage accountability and honesty in government.

There is, however, a risk that attempts to improve constitutional arrangements may deteriorate into lengthy, sterile and divisive debates among specialists. If this should happen, their value will be negative as they consume time and national energies which could be devoted to urgent practical matters. In so doing they will further contribute to the sense of alienation now prevailing among much of Nigeria's population.

There is clearly much to be done in and for Nigeria. The Canadian government wishes to accompany Nigeria -- and we encourage Canadian civil society and business to do so as well -- as it pursues its path to democracy and sustainable development. Minister Axworthy has made it very clear that our objective is restoration of the broad and deep relationship between Canada and Nigeria that existed in the past. We are, like you, seeking the best ways to achieve this. The Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade will be looking to work in partnership with CIDA and IDRC, and most importantly, with Canadian and Nigerian civil society and business partners to bring this about. We look forward to your suggestions and indeed to your very practical recommendations on how we might work together.

Nigerian Priorities

We see it, the most urgent task facing Nigeria is a double task. It is that of bringing those resources to bear on the desperate needs of the poor and middle classes. These desperate 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 unbearable burdens on the police and the judicial system. Despair, instability and unrest lead to that terrible affliction which so undermines Nigerian society, corruption.

Working 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.