

**KEY NOTE ADDRESS DELIVERED AT THE CONFERENCE  
"DEMOCRATIC TRANSFORMATION IN NIGERIA:  
CANADIAN FOREIGN POLICY OPTIONS"  
HELD IN OTTAWA, CANADA ON APRIL 14 & 15, 1999  
by Dr. Beko Ransome-Kuti**

**CREATING A POLITICAL ENVIRONMENT THAT ENCOURAGES CIVIL  
SOCIETY PARTICIPATION IN GOVERNANCE**

First, I want to acknowledge the courageous and noble role that the government and people of Canada played in the struggles of Nigerians for democracy during the dark days of the Abacha regime. Canada could always be counted upon both inside Nigeria and in the international forum. Its leadership role in the Commonwealth in championing the cause of democracy stood out as a shining example. It is also on record that Canada was the only country that took the principled stand of withdrawing its mission from Nigeria in spite of great disadvantage and inconvenience to its interests. We cannot forget how Canada gave the beleaguered human rights and pro-democracy groups all possible support. We also cannot thank the Canadian people enough for the kindness they have shown to Nigerians who managed to find their way to these shores while fleeing from all kinds of danger at home. We hope we shall be able to repay you if only by improving our society at home by that little bit.

A few days' visit to Nigeria will convince any observer that the centre can no longer hold. The basic infrastructures have almost collapsed. There are only very few places where tap water can be obtained at any time. Electricity supply, which was haphazard at best, is now becoming a rarity. It is not unknown for electricity supply to be cut off and restored ten times in one day. There are places where they have not had electricity for up to three months.

Nigeria, which happens to be the world's ninth largest oil producer, cannot supply its petroleum needs. There have been daily queues at petrol stations, stretching for kilometres in some places. While this is going on, the four refineries in the country have broken down due to lack of basic maintenance. The Ministers of Finance and Petroleum traded accusations in public as to the whereabouts of the money meant for this purpose. Attempts to import petrol to meet the shortfall were also mismanaged due to corruption and nepotism. Meanwhile, the price of petrol keeps shooting up - from 20k per litre in 1986 to N20 in 1998. That is a 10,000-fold increase.

The economy has not fared better. Unemployment is rampant and has been as