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CANADA CONCERNED AT DELAYED DEMOCRACY IN NIGERIA

Foreign Affairs Minister André Ouellet today expressed deep concern at further setbacks in Nigeria's promised return to democracy. Today, June 12, marks the second anniversary of the annulled presidential election, which was widely considered the most fair and peaceful in Nigeria's history.

In recognition of the anniversary, Minister Ouellet announced that the Honourable Christine Stewart, Secretary of State (Latin America and Africa), will meet today with Dr. Wole Soyinka, a leader in Nigeria's democratic movement and that country's only Nobel prize winner (Literature, 1986).

"I am pleased to be able to meet with such a distinguished advocate of democracy and human rights," said Mrs. Stewart. "Nigerians have lived under military rule for 12 years and have demonstrated their readiness and enthusiasm for the democratic process. I look forward to discussing with Dr. Soyinka how Canada and the Commonwealth can assist in ensuring that the regime takes clear and measurable action to restore democracy, the rule of law and respect for human rights."

Nigeria has been under military rule for a generation except for a period of democracy from 1979 to 1983. Since General Sani Abacha came to power in a 1993 coup, his regime has disbanded all elected bodies, jailed the undeclared winner of the annulled election, Chief Moshood Abiola, and many other democratic leaders, closed newspapers, repressed labour unions and minorities, given itself absolute legal power and immunity, ended the right of habeas corpus and carried out public executions.

Canadian measures limiting official contact with Nigeria's military regime adopted in 1993, when General Sani Abacha came to power, remain in force.

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