

Canadian Centre
for Foreign Policy
Development



Centre canadien
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de la politique étrangère

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**ROUNDTABLE ON NIGERIA:
RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE
COMMONWEALTH MINISTERIAL ACTION GROUP (CMAG)**

Nasreen Bhimani, Canadian Centre for Foreign Policy Development
John Harker

February 10, 1997

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February 25, 1997

Dear friends,

Thank you once again for your very valuable contribution at the Roundtable on Nigeria this past February. This Roundtable was an important event for the Ministers and the departmental officials responsible for the Commonwealth and Nigeria.

We are very pleased to have assisted in bringing you together and look forward to keeping in touch about your roles and our common interests.

Please find attached Nasreen's summary report and covering memo.

Best wishes,

Steve Lee
Director

MEMO

To: Gordon S. Smith, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs
Marc-André Brault, Assistant Deputy Minister, Asia-Pacific and Africa
Paul Heinbecker, Assistant Deputy Minister, Global and Security Policy
Marius Bujold, Special Envoy, Nigeria and Central Africa
Paul Roche, Nigeria and Central Africa
Stephen Moran, West and Central African Division
Roderick Bell, Director, UN and Commonwealth Affairs Division
Hartmuth Kroll, Deputy Director, Commonwealth Affairs Division
Julia Wyand, Institutional Issues, Commonwealth Affairs Section
Peter Newton, CIDA

From: Steve Lee and Nasreen Bhimani

Date: February 25, 1997

Re: Roundtable on Nigeria, February 10, 1997

Attached, please find the summary report from the Roundtable with the Commonwealth associations. Minister Axworthy and Secretary of State Stewart both attended. The Roundtable was chaired by Steve Lee and the proceedings were recorded by Nasreen Bhimani. Some follow-up actions have been recommended and some are required. Please note the request for outside monitoring of the trials now underway. Some attention is also required on the Botswana meeting of African leaders, and initiatives to support Commonwealth activities in Canada and abroad. Since the Roundtable, we have had discussions with Joe Stern, Martha Nelems, Roderick Bell and Julia Wayand.

Your comments are welcome.

cc. Michael Pearson, Senior Policy Advisor, MINA
Joe Stern, Special Advisor, MINA
Martha Nelems, Special Assistant, MINA
Ferry de Kerckhove, Director General, Policy Planning

ROUNDTABLE ON NIGERIA
February 10, 1997
Summary of Recommendations

The Roundtable on Nigeria was held as a result of Minister Axworthy and Minister Stewart's request for consultation with Commonwealth NGOs in preparation for the CMAG meetings in London on February 17, 1997.

Several of the NGOs, including the Journalists Association, the Lawyers Association, the Human Rights Initiative, the Trades Union Council, the Royal Society and Judicial Education were represented along with departmental officials and ministerial staff. The Roundtable was chaired by Steve Lee, Director of the CCFPD. Both Ministers were also present.

The NGOs were asked to present their views and assessment of Canadian government's policy and the situation in Nigeria. They were also asked to address the capacity and the role civil society in both countries could play in helping the Nigerian people restore the rule of law.

In general, the NGOs agreed with the government's policy on Nigeria. They suggested however, that the government take a proactive approach by supporting Canadian NGO activities which enable communication between the civil societies and which could result eventually in putting an end to the human rights violations.

To this end several policy options were identified; that,

- as currently two parallel courts have been set up, one judicial and one military, the Canadian government consider supporting the CBA and the CLA in establishing links with the judiciary in Nigeria. This would assist the judiciary in both countries exchange information and expertise, and assist the Nigerian judiciary in their efforts to return the country to civil law,
- the government consider asking Desmond Tutu, who led the last fact-finding mission to the prisons in Nigeria, to conduct a sermon at the St. Giles Cathedral on the Sunday prior to the New Edinburgh meetings, and,
- that the Canadian government consider persuading the CMAG members to request a second tour of the prisons in Nigeria.

In addition, that,

- as suggested by the CLA which is willing to be actively involved in the process, the Canadian government consider negotiating the potential for hi-level mediation between Shell Oil and the Nigerian government. Shell may be persuaded to offer economic opportunities

and to help reverse the environmental degradation in the country. This could be offered in return for several demands including fair trials for detainees and an amelioration of conditions in the prisons,

- the Canadian government participate in the CLA meetings at the end of May 1997 in an effort to explore ways in which the Canadian judiciary can better work with their counterparts around the world and in Nigeria in an effort to help resolve the judicial situation,
- the Canadian government support the request of the Nigerian judiciary for impartial international observers at the upcoming Ogoni trials of the remaining group of 18 detainees. This would be done by assisting those who have volunteered to attend by facilitating the issuing of visas etc.,
- the Canadian government consider issuing a minority report if a consensus is not reached at the New Edinburgh meetings, notwithstanding the polarization between Canada and the rest of the Commonwealth countries and the cultural sensitivities surrounding the discussions,
- the Canadian government support the creation of a web-site for several reasons, including fostering linkages between groups involved in and interested in Nigeria in an attempt to collaborate and coordinate activities, countering disinformation by the Nigerian government, keeping the issue on the front page, and engaging Canadian youth,
- the Canadian government support the work being done by the Canadian and the Nigerian judiciary by facilitating the supply of lap-tops to enable Nigerian lawyers to get on-line legal advice in general, and especially during trials.

In turn, the Commonwealth NGOs committed themselves to greater communication and coordination amongst themselves in order to be more effective, networking with Nigerian civil society through their own associations and encouraging training programs and student exchanges in fields that Canadian expertise is recognized e.g. constitutional issues, public legal education, sensitivity training, fact-finding and judicial ethics. As well, the NGOs committed to actively engaging other Commonwealth countries civil societies in continual and regular dialogue.

**ROUNDTABLE ON NIGERIA
FEBRUARY 10, 1997**

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