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## NIGERIA'S PROBLEMS:

### Background and Solutions

The area of what is today Nigeria has had a rich history dating back to 500 B.C. However, in the interest of paper, I will not go into that. Let me begin where the roots of Nigeria's major problems today began: the period of colonization. The British took control of Nigeria under the auspices of the Royal Niger Company. At first, it was two separate colonies, one in the South, and one in the North. Eventually, the British crown took control of the colony and the North and the South was united. The official borders for Nigeria were set arbitrarily at the Berlin Conference of 1885 with no regard to natural or ethnic boundaries. The British used their standard colonizing method of indirect rule. They ruled through the traditional Islamic hierarchy in the North, and in the West, they ruled through the existing Yoruba governing structure. In the East, the part of the country where Things Fall Apart took place, there was no traditional ruling class of chiefs, and so the British created one. The British strongly encouraged missions work in the East and West, but not in the North, because they didn't want to anger the powerful and influential Islamic ruling class. Along with missionaries came most of the early schools. Because of the lack of mission activity in the North, there was not as much opportunity for a Western style education as in the East and West. Because of this, people from the East and West, especially Easterners were hired preferentially for positions in the British civil service. The largely Ibo Easterners were very aggressive and with the advantages brought by their Western education and their close association with the British, they spread all over the country, and became Nigeria's dominant traders and salesmen. These divisions brought on by differential treatment of Muslims and Christians, Northerners, and Southerners, Easterners and Westerners, by the British are the roots of some of Nigeria's most serious political problems today.

The efforts of men like Nnamdi Azikwe, Obafemi Awolowo and countless others led to Nigeria's independence on October 1, 1960. However, Nigeria was not really ready for it. Nigeria had a far greater proportion of educated citizens than most other colonies, but there were still not enough Nigerians with enough experience in leadership to run an efficient government and bureaucracy in a completely foreign governmental system. At independence, Nigeria was divided into three provinces, the North dominated by the Hausa, the East dominated by the Ibos, and the West dominated by the Yoruba. They were left with a parliamentary system of government at the national level, while the provinces each had substantial autonomy. As the North was the largest province in area and population, they were usually able to get their way in government. It appeared as



though the British divided the country this way to win over the support of the Northerners who had felt left out before. Nigeria's first Prime Minister was Alhaji Sir Tafawa Balewa, a northern Muslim. The Northerners in government worked to rectify their lack of equality in numbers in the civil service. Northerners without proper experience or education replaced Southerners, especially Ibos in the civil service. Each group's main aim was to get the most they could for their own people as fast as possible, a trend that has continued. The national government became unbelievably corrupt and indisciplined. In 1965, Chinua Achebe wrote a book called A Man of the People which spoke of the disaster the government was heading the country into. It even boldly predicted that the government would be overthrown, a prophecy that came true in 1966. A group of military officers based in the Kaduna Army Barracks attempted to overthrow the government and in the process assassinated countless government leaders, including the Prime Minister and the Premier of the North, Alhaji Ahmadu Bello. The coup failed, but there was no longer a viable government left to run the country, so the leaders of the military moved in to fill the vacuum to prevent anarchy. General Johnson Ironsi was chosen as the head of state until new elections could be held. Ironsi was an Ibo man, and Northerners quickly spread rumors that the coup had been orchestrated by the Ibos so that they could again take control. This was far from the truth as Ironsi was not involved in the coup, and the coup leaders were themselves Northerners. However, with the capital in Yoruba land and an Ibo head of state, the Hausa feared that they would lose all their influence. Six months after Ironsi was picked as head of state, he was assassinated in a successful coup led by Major General Murtala Mohammed. General Yakubu Gowon became head of state. Northerners saw this as their opportunity to get back at the Ibos, since both Gowon and Mohammed were Northerners of sorts. Houses and stores owned by Ibos were burned and Ibos were slaughtered left and right. It looked like a repeat of what had happened to the Jews of Germany. Ibos fled in mass back to the East, and in the process, most trade in the country fell apart. Gowon's government tried to keep things under control and protect the Ibos, but they couldn't stop the blood shed. The military Premier of the East, Major Chukwumeka Ojukwu, saw the only solution to the problem was to create an independent Ibo nation, and so the Eastern Province seceded and claimed independence as the Republic of Biafra. This led to Nigeria's terribly bloody civil war known as the Biafran War.

The war ended in 1970, and Gowon's government quickly set out on a path of reconciliation. Within two years, evidence of one of history's harshest conflicts had almost completely disappeared from everywhere but people's hearts. To put an end to regional conflict, Gowon divided the provinces, which now numbered four, into 12 states. Larger



minority ethnic groups were given their own states, and the Ibos, Yorubas and Hausas each had a few. Reconstruction was made possible by the huge influx of money brought in by the increase in oil prices. Nigeria suddenly had so much money that they didn't know what to do with it. They built roads, and schools, and hospitals, and spent unbelievable amounts on worthless prestige projects rather than using the money carefully and saving some for a rainy day. Farmers left their fields to go to the cities and get their share of the oil wealth. The situation looked promising, and everyone wanted a part of the action. Gowon remained in power for an unusually long time, but by 1975, he began to lose control. His government had fallen to corruption, and Nigeria's never ending hangover from the oil boom was beginning. A country that a few years before easily fed itself had begun to import food. The trouble was only beginning. He was overthrown by the very man that put him in power, General Murtala Mohammed, in a bloodless coup. Gowon was in Kampala for an OAU conference and he escaped to England to study political science, after governing the world's 10th most populous nation for nine years!

Mohammed became very popular by creating 7 new states, bringing the number to 19. He also launched the dream of building a new national capital in the center of the country where it could be removed from the hustle and bustle of Lagos. It would also be politically advantageous to all non-Yorubas as it would move the capital away from the Yoruba heartland. They found the geographic center of Nigeria and created a Federal Capital Territory around it. The village in the center was named Nyanya, but the government didn't like that name, so they named the new capital after the next village over, Abuja. This village has been transformed into a sprawling modern city in the biggest construction project in the history of the world. Murtala was assassinated by Major Buka Dimka in a botched coup barely six months after he had seized power. Gowon was believed to be behind the coup, and he was banned from returning to Nigeria. The position of the head of state fell to Murtala's next in command, General Olusegun Obasanjo. He didn't really want the position, but took it any way. For most of his three years in power, the country was run by Obasanjo's number two man, Major General Shehu Yar Adua, a man who is now back at the fore front of Nigeria's political seen. Obasanjo's foremost objective was to return Nigeria to democracy, and it is for this reason that he was nearly chosen instead of Boutrous Ghali as the United Nations Secretary General.

An American federal system was chosen, and several parties were formed as soon as political activity was legalized. In spite of attempts to prevent it, the three major parties were all ethnically based. Millions of naira were spent on the campaign, and in the end the Hausa dominated National Party of Nigeria, led by Alhaji Shehu Shagari, a former school teacher, triumphed. Many laws in the Constitution of 1979 forced the president to have



an ethnically diverse cabinet, but the Hausas were still very much in control. Shagari's government followed the pattern of most of their predecessors and mismanaged the country. In their first four years in power, the national debt increased by about 700% for no reason other than the lining of government official's pockets. People were very disillusioned with Shagari's government, but he won a resounding victory again in 1983 in one of history's most corrupt elections. Many jokes have been told about this election, but this is the best: Reagan, Thatcher, and Shagari were in a sinking boat. There was only one life jacket for the three of them, and so they were arguing about who should get to use it. Thatcher said that as she was the only woman, she should get it. Reagan said that since he was the oldest, he should get it. Shagari said that as they all came from democratic nations, they should take a vote for it. They agreed on this and in the results, Reagan got one vote, as did Thatcher. Shagari received 2,159,328 votes from the southern part of the boat alone! If the poll results were accurate, every eligible voter in Nigeria voted for Shagari several times! Shagari remained in office and continued Nigeria on the road to disaster. His government was very corrupt, and the epitome of the situation was exhibited by Umaru Dikko. Due to a food shortage in Nigeria, Shagari decided to start a government program to provide cheap imported rice for the people. He appointed his good friend Umaru Dikko as the Minister of Rice in charge of the project. Dikko got the money from the government to pay for the rice, as well as the money from the people who were going to sell it, but never paid those he got it from. When Shagari was overthrown, Dikko escaped to England with his estimated \$4 billion of stolen money. Even after several attempts to bring him back to Nigeria to face justice, Britain has refused to extradite him. Obviously, a loss of \$4 billion would cause problems even in Britain's economy! Dikko is the worst example of how bad things had become.

Shagari was overthrown on New Years Eve, 1983, by Major General Mohammed Buhari. Buhari and his right hand man, Major Idiagbon, went on a campaign called War Against Indiscipline to set Nigeria straight. They jailed all the corrupt officials of Shagari's regime, and fought corruption in the civil service. They had good intentions, but were often too ruthless. This brought them bad international press as they were consistently accused of human rights abuse. No matter what any one said then, Nigerians today wish that Buhari and Idiagbon had been allowed to finish their work. They were what Nigeria needed and needs: powerful, but honest dictators who didn't accept any fooling around. Nigeria was being put back on the right path. Buhari and Idiagbon decided to get rid of some of their cabinet ministers whose honesty they questioned. One of those whom they planned to retire was none other than the Minister of Defense, Major General Ibrahim Babangida. Babangida heard of this, and acted quickly. In August 1985,



one week before he was going to be relieved of his duties, he overthrew Buhari promising to free Nigeria from a tyrannical dictator.

At first, the Nigerian people hailed Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida, known simply as IBB, as a saviour. He sought ways to revive Nigeria's dying economy. He asked the Nigerian people if they wanted an IMF loan, and they said no. He went ahead with the programs he would have had to go through if he had accepted the loan any ways. He put Nigeria on a Structural Adjustment Program to improve the economy. He called on everyone to bear extra hardships to better Nigeria. Commodities were rationed, and everyone was speaking of austerity measures. He devalued the Naira. On September 30, 1986, it was worth \$1.60. The next day, it was worth 25 cents. It continued to devalue from there to its present official rate of N35 to the dollar. Most Nigerians willingly went along with all these in the hopes of better days. Then, IBB took an IMF loan against the will of the people, and Dele Giwa, a magazine editor and outspoken critic of the government was mysteriously killed by a parcel bomb. Rumors were spreading that IBB's wife Maryam was heavily involved in the Nigerian drug smuggling rackets and that IBB himself was siphoning off funds from oil at the rate of \$1 from every barrel. His reputation began to slide, but IBB began to prove himself as a clever, resilient leader and became known as the Maradona of African politics. Things got better for him when he promised a return to democracy by 1990. This return was soon postponed to 1992. A constituent assembly was formed to draw up a new constitution, and they spent months discussing important issues like whether or not coups should be outlawed. The result of the work of the assembly is the 1989 Constitution that was governing Nigeria until the recent coup. The ban on political activities was lifted, and a horde of new parties was formed. Each new party had to be approved by the federal military government upon submission of their manifesto and N500,000. None of the eight or so parties were accepted, and no one knows what happened to the money. Instead, IBB created two parties of his own, one a little to the left known as the Social Democratic Party, and one a little to the right known as the National Republican Convention. In fact, there is little difference between the parties, but they could not be called party A and party B could they? These parties were federally funded and their chairmen were appointed by the National Electoral Commission. They each put up candidates for the Local Government Elections, the third tier of the Nigerian governmental system, held in February 1990. They again competed in the elections for the governors of the present 30 states in December 1991. Then, the campaign for the senate, house of representatives and the presidency began. The senators and representatives were elected in December 1992 as scheduled, but the presidential election was postponed to June 1993 because of rigging in the primaries.



The primaries were extremely corrupt, and most people felt IBB was justified in banning all the candidates. They started all over, and in April 1993 two candidates emerged. The NRC's candidate was Alhaji Bashir Othman Tofa, a Northern Muslim business man known to be an Islamic radical. The SDP's candidate was Alhaji Chief Bashorun Moshood Kolawole Abiola. Abiola was a nominal Muslim Yoruba who became wealthy first through luck, then through cheating the government. He and IBB had participated in numerous scams together, and had been close friends for a long time. Two days before the election was held, an organization headed by a former presidential candidate known as the Association For a Better Nigeria took a case to the Nigerian federal high court saying the election was illegal and anyone who participated was committing a crime. This caused confusion, but the Electoral Commission said the election would take place anyway. June 12 came, and the most peaceful and fair election in Nigerian, or even African history took place. I was there, and I saw it, there was no room for rigging this time. The results began pouring in. It was quickly evident that Abiola was winning, he even beat Tofa in Tofa's home state of Kano. He was also well on the way of getting the necessary one third of the vote in two thirds of the states. All the results were in except those from Taraba State, and IBB blocked those from being released. The high court had sided with the Association for a Better Nigeria and had declared the election illegal on some technicality no one understood or believed. IBB annulled the election saying that there had been too much malpractice. Everyone waited to see what would happen. Abiola told his supporters to keep calm and that he was waiting to be declared president elect by IBB. This never happened. There was an attempt on Abiola's life, and he fled the country. He went on a campaign calling for sanctions against Nigeria until he was given what was rightfully his, the presidency. The USA and Britain demanded that IBB release the election results, but he refused telling them they should not interfere. On August 27, IBB stepped down, and handed over to an interim government headed by Harvard educated, but politically inexperienced, industrialist Ernest Shonekan, a Yoruba Christian.

The Interim Government was made up mostly of the same people from the Transitional Government IBB had created to get his 1993 budget passed by the senate and the house of representatives. The Deputy President was General Sani Abacha, IBB's Minister of Defense and close friend. The Interim Government was seen as a continuation of IBB's government, at least until he and Abacha had an argument and Shonekan began acting like a leader rather than a puppet. No one really understands why IBB did what he did. Abiola was a close friend and would never investigate IBB's corrupt dealings as Abiola himself was part of most of them. The only reason anyone could come up with for IBB denying Abiola the presidency was that he feared that his people, the Muslims of the



North, would lose power and influence again if a Southerner was head of state. But then, why did he hand over to a Southern Christian when Abiola was at least a nominal Muslim? The dates for new presidential elections were set for February 1994, four years after IBB first promised a full return to democracy. The Interim Government made a necessary increase in local fuel prices by 800%, and also deposed all the Local Government Councils. This quickly brought forth protests from all sides of the country which the Interim Government did not know how to handle. The little bit of confidence that people had began to have in them was shattered. Talk of civil war and the break up of the country began to be commonplace. Even though the country was in confusion, no one was expecting what took place on November 17. After just 82 days in office, Ernest Shonekan resigned his post as Chairman of the Interim Government, and naturally, the deputy head of state, General Sani Abacha, succeeded him.

At first, this was not a coup. But, when Abacha dissolved the Interim Government and the Senate and deposed the state governors, it became one. He then suspended the 1989 Constitution, and put Nigeria back under the 1979 Constitution. It was amazing, probably the smoothest coup ever, anywhere. No guns, no blood, just a few simple words and it was accomplished. For the first time in Nigerian history, the people did not readily accept the return to military rule. The Nigerian people are sick of the military and they let Abacha know this. In spite of his tough words that anyone who opposed him would be shot, people from all walks of life spoke against him. He heeded the criticism, and successfully squelched it by his cabinet appointments. Of the 33 cabinet posts, only Abacha and the deputy head of state are military men. The rest of the cabinet is made up of highly experienced civilian politicians from all over Nigeria. Several staunchly anti-military men are in the cabinet, including Babagana Kingibe, Abiola's running mate, and the former Senate president, Ayu Iyorchia. Another big surprise was the appointment of a civil rights lawyer, Dr. Olu Onagoruwa, to the post of Minister of Justice. Abacha deftly quelled the protests against the fuel price hike by reducing the new price per liter by about half. He also firmly established himself as the sole ruler by retiring 17 military officers loyal to IBB. Despite protests at first, it seems that he has now been accepted by the people, because under the Interim Government, no one really knew where Nigeria was going. I think this can best be seen in a quotation from Babagana Kingibe, Nigeria's new Minister of Foreign Affairs, *"The coming of General Abacha's government has been really received with more a sense of relief, because nobody knew the way forward."* Now that IBB's return to democracy has been totally dismantled, people have begun to realize how shaky it had been to begin with. Many now believe that IBB designed the return to democracy in such a way that it was destined to fail so that he could return to



power as a saviour. However, Abacha was one step ahead of him. Abacha claims he stepped in when he did to prevent a coup that was being planned by junior officers. He has promised a constitutional conference, whose members will be elected within two months, to decide on Nigeria's future. Perhaps Abacha's coup saved Nigeria, or maybe he is just another Maradona. Only time will tell. Whatever happens, Abacha and his more than able cabinet have a lot of problems to deal with.

Economy wise, Nigeria is in shambles. The once proud naira is now officially equal to about 3 cents, and on the black market as low as 1 cent. Besides that, Nigeria's national debt is now so high that it cannot be paid. Even paying for the interest takes a big chunk of federal revenue. The sad thing is that most of the loan money never got to where it was supposed to go. Most foreign loans are only given for specific development or agricultural projects that will benefit the people. However, once the money arrives, most of it is siphoned off by the head of state and everyone else involved in the project. Needless to say, nothing ever gets done. The external debt is presently in the area of \$35 billion. Reports say that there is a total of at least \$50 billion stashed away in secret Swiss bank accounts by Nigerians, enough to easily pay off the debt. The corrupt practices began in the first republic have only been perfected, and Abacha himself has already accumulated a handsome amount from his days in IBB's cabinet. Evidently, the Nigerian government has very little money in spite of the countless millions of dollars coming in from Nigeria's oil exports. There is no reason for Nigeria to be a poverty stricken nation. It is very sad to see so many millions of people living in such poverty in a country with so much potential. The average Nigerian can hardly feed himself, let alone his family. The liveliness and vitality that characterizes Nigerians is slowly being squeezed out of them simply because of the greed of those in power. The governmental mismanagement is so bad, that Nigeria has been forced to import refined oil. Petrol is so cheap in Nigeria that it is being smuggled across the borders leaving a terrible shortage that has made all transportation difficult for the past half year. People wait in petrol queues for up to 4 days or buy poor quality dirty petrol at inflated prices from black market dealers. This situation is sickening considering Nigeria is OPEC's 4th largest producer of crude oil! The situation has gotten a little better with the increase in petrol prices, but it is still a problem

Another major problem facing the interim government is inter ethnic and religious strife. There is still a great amount of ethnocentrism in Nigeria. All the oil and resources are in the South, but for some strange reason, most of the wealth is controlled by the resourceless North. This causes many southerners, especially Ibos to call for secession again, and it also keeps the Northerners on their toes to prevent losing power and control over the wealth. Besides these wide spread gripes between the major groups, there is also



strife between smaller ethnic groups. In the last few years, thousands have died, and farms and villages have been destroyed in a land war between the Jukun and the Tiv people in Taraba State. This is only the most visible ethnic friction. Almost every group in Nigeria has a quarrel with one or more other groups around them. The federal government has tried to reduce the friction by the continual creation of new states, now numbering 30, and new local government areas, now numbering over 500. Due to all this friction, there is obviously still little national unity in Nigeria. The people are much more politically educated than in years past and vote more for able leaders than just for someone from their own group, but there is still a long way to go before a true national identity is established. Presently, the only thing everyone in Nigeria is loyal to are the Super Eagles, the national soccer team. Besides inter ethnic strife, there is also religious strife. The North has been an Islamic strong hold for a long time, and the South has always been predominantly Christian. However, this is changing. There is an increasing number of Southern Muslims, and an even faster increasing number of Northern Christians. Kano State, one of the Islamic strong holds of Nigeria, now has more Christians than Muslims. Presently, it is estimated that Nigerians are about 45% Muslim, 45% Christian, and 10% traditional religions. This makes Nigeria one of the world's biggest Christian, and Muslim nations. The encroachment of Christianity onto Islamic strongholds has led to much persecution of converts. The Muslims in the North are on edge, and several times over the last few years, there have been serious outbreaks of violence. The usual pattern is that Muslims begin to burn churches and slaughter Christians. When it gets too bad, the Christians fight back, and kill a few Muslims. Then, the government sends in troops to end the violence, and blames everything on the Christians. The odd thing is that these uprisings rarely spread far, and are forgotten quickly. Nigerians speculate that if there is going to be another civil war, it will be between Muslims and Christians rather than being an ethnic conflict.

Then of course, are the population and environmental problems. Nigeria presently has 88.5 million people living in an area the size of Texas and Oklahoma. It is already quite crowded, but it is getting worse. Predictions have been made that Nigeria's population will exceed that of the United States by the year 2025. The government has waged many campaigns promoting birth control and child spacing, and is presently trying to enforce the law of only four children per wife. The number of Nigerians who realize it is now wiser not to have so many children is growing, but these people are still a minority. Even the poorest beggar on the street dreams of having 10 or more sons. There are already not nearly enough schools and hospitals for all the people. Those that exist are poorly equipped, and the workers are often not paid. University education has gotten so



bad that this year there have only been about four weeks of classes due to a student strike, then a faculty strike, and then an administrative strike. Considering how bad things are already, it is scary to think of what it is going to be like when the population is three times what it is now.

Due to deforestation, desertification, erosion, and population expansion, the already limited amount of available farm land is getting smaller. In the '60's Nigeria could feed itself, now it cannot nearly do so. The quality of food eaten by the common man has gone way down, and very few people in Nigeria eat adequately. The king of foods spoken about in Things Fall Apart, the yam, now costs almost a day's wage for one! Ecologically speaking, things are only going to get worse. The Sahara is moving further and further south, and the remaining forests in the South are quickly being cleared.

Because of the low incomes and poor educational system in Nigeria, anyone who can gets out. Many go to study abroad and then never return home. Those who do go home stay only for a short while until they can longer hack it. Then they run off to places like Saudi Arabia and Botswana to find more lucrative jobs. Economically speaking, it is next to impossible for anyone with a good education to stay in Nigeria anymore, unless you are in government. Those that do stay deserve much respect.

Besides having to deal with the problems of corruption, lack of funds, mismanagement in the petroleum sector, lack of national unity, inter ethnic and religious strife, overpopulation, lack of adequate health and educational institutions, ecological problems and the brain drain, Abacha's government has to make itself accepted to Nigerians and the outside world. Nigerians are slowly beginning to accept him, mostly because of his superb cabinet appointments, but I doubt he will ever be seen as a truly legitimate head of state. The United States and the European Union have increased their military sanctions that they imposed on IBB when he annulled the June 12 election. The sanctions involve an embargo on military equipment to Nigeria, and the expelling of all Nigerian military personnel studying in those countries. These sanctions are designed to hurt the military, and not the people of Nigeria. However, this does not seem to be the case as it indirectly affects Nigerians. Adekunle Olumide, the director -- general of the Lagos Chamber of Commerce says that *"It (the military sanctions) will indicate that things are still not right in Nigeria."* He is correct in his assumption that any kind of sanctions will scare off foreign investors. I have personally come to the conclusion that Abacha's government may be the best thing that has happened to Nigeria since Buhari. Abacha is very disciplined and strict, but will not be able to abuse human rights because of the powerful civil rights organizations now present in Nigeria. He is also already extremely wealthy, and thus no longer need to enrich himself through corruption. His cabinet is



made up of the cream of the crop, and if they are allowed to do their jobs without too much regulation by Abacha, they may turn things around. They have a lot of work cut out for them, and I would like to make some suggestions on how to solve the problems.

The problem of corruption in the Nigerian government is so entrenched that I believe it will be one of the most difficult problems to irradiate. The attitude of almost anyone entering the civil service or the government is one of getting his share of the national cake. I guess it would not be so bad if it stopped at that. Unfortunately, they are also under pressure to get the share of the cake for their relatives, friends, and anyone else who may have some connection with him. With this kind of attitude, getting rid of corruption completely is impossible. However, we must realize that there is corruption everywhere. Small time corruption is not going to harm a country as oil rich as Nigeria. What causes the problems is the large scale corruption that the people at the top are involved in. The corruption at the top is so bad that an amount greater than the national debt has been siphoned off into personal accounts from public funds. The standard kickback to a state governor or federal minister who awards a contract is at least 10% of the entire contract, and that does not include what the head of state and the other big boys take. The first thing Nigerians need to do about this is to stop being so silent about it. When they hear of a politician or civil servant being involved in large scale corruption, they need to rise up against that person and get him thrown out of office. Considering the great amount of influence human rights and labour groups have had over the events of the last few months, one can see that the government now realizes it must listen to the people or it will not survive. Unfortunately, the common man is still very afraid of anyone in power above him, no matter how bad or corrupt a leader they are, and it is not going to be easy to convince him that he can really do something about it. Another step in solving this problem will be to demand for the banks of Switzerland, London, and Paris, who willingly hide away all the stolen money in secret accounts, to tell the truth. The Italian government recently did this to find out the extent to which the Mafia and a previous government had been in cahoots. It may seem like a demand that will never be accepted, but if Nigerians all over the world, as well as people from other nations who have this type of problem put enough pressure on organization like the United Nations and the European Union, who knows what might happen. Maybe I am being unrealistic, but with enough pressure, the banks will open up and allow Nigeria and other governments to repatriate the money. If the West is so set on getting third world nations to pay back their debts, then they should first do their part in getting the portion of the borrowed money that has been siphoned off illegally out of secret bank accounts. Several third world nations have had their debts cancelled, but Nigeria does not deserve this. Until the people



and the government in power exhibit enough responsibility and honesty to merit such an action, it should not be done, because it would simply mean that all the people with the secret accounts are forever off the hook. Nigeria has enough resources to pay its debt, but the people just have not yet learned to stand up against corruption. Presently, national debt servicing is taking up so much of the funds that along with the amount being siphoned off, nothing is getting accomplished. Also, due to Nigeria's present instability and poor reputation, no one is going to give the government loans. This is good, but there are many institutions other than the government that could do wonders with loans. If international donor and loan organizations like the World Bank would be willing to give donations and loans to non-governmental organizations, many of the problems of the funds not getting where they should would be eradicated. In Nigeria, anything the government touches is almost sure to fail. Given the opportunity, NGO's run by competent Nigerians could much more efficiently accomplish the development projects that the government never completes. Obviously, the donors and loan givers would first have to do a thorough check on the organizations the funds are going to. If this was done, it would not only reduce the amount of money government officials siphoned off, but also give the source of the money more control over the project so that they could make sure that what the money was obtained for was what it was being used for. It boggles my mind to think how much could be accomplished without the government always bungling everything up.

Most of Nigeria's problems are tied together in some way or another. I just addressed the problems of corruption, the national debt and lack of funds together as they are all related. The petrol shortage is also a problem that is linked to many others, including smuggling and the sorry state of the economy. For the longest time, fuel in Nigeria was the cheapest in the world because it was so heavily subsidized. A liter of petrol, or gas, was about three cents. Because of this cheap rate, petrol was being smuggled in unbelievable quantities to neighboring countries where it was far more expensive. The smuggling got so bad, that Nigeria had to import petrol for local use. The problem has pretty much been settled, but it is an example of how difficult it is for the government to solve even seemingly simple problems. To end the smuggling problem, it was necessary for the government to drop the subsidy and increase the price per liter to a more realistic 20 cents per liter. IBB tried to raise the price right before he stepped down, but was forced to back down under pressure from the people. Shonekan did raise the price, but the resulting protests were one of the major factors that forced him to resign. When Abacha took over, he brought the price down to about 12 cents a liter. The government did what it could to solve the problem, but it was difficult because the



increase in the price of petrol has a major impact on the economy. With a petrol price increase, public transport cost goes up, as does everything else in turn, except of course for salaries. It costs more than a day's salary for even a middle class Nigerian to fill his tank now. Twelve cents a liter may sound cheap, but it is not in the Nigerian context. It would be equivalent to a cost of about \$10 a gallon here, probably even more. The economy is so fragile in Nigeria that even an increase in fuel price can be devastating to the people and in turn bring down a head of state. This is an example of how tough it can be for the government to actually solve problems. Some of the solutions seem so obvious, but often the government cannot do anything because of the wide range of counter effects.

Solving the problem of lack of national unity will involve an immense effort on the part of the government in an area that is really not high on their list of priorities. With the sorry state of the economy, they have other things to worry about, although I feel that creating a true national identity would be an additional help in solving these problems. The major program the government has to promote national unity is the National Youth Service Corps. Under this program, all university graduates are required to serve the government for a year in a state they have not lived before. This has been a big help because in many cases, university students lose their prejudices against other ethnic groups by living among them for a while. In many instances, the graduates end up getting a job and settling in the same place they had their NYSC assignment. Another way in which the government is trying to create a national identity is through sports. Sports can be a great unifier for a nation, and Nigeria is attempting to use it as such, although mismanagement often gets in the way. A third mode of developing national unity is through trade fairs. Most of Nigeria's major cities hold annual trade fairs at which merchants, artists, and entertainers from all over the country come to show their stuff, and hopefully make a little money. These are three very good solutions, but much more needs to be done. The obvious solution is to encourage people in government to end their nepotistic ways, but this, like corruption is too engrained in the psyche to get rid of. I think the best solution is to set up a specific federal task force to promote the cultural diversity of Nigeria, and in turn the unity that the appreciation of this diversity can bring. The task force should be headed by someone like Wole Soyinka, Chinua Achebe or some other famous Nigerian who has made Nigeria internationally known through literature, music, or art. It should be made up of traditional story tellers, healers, musicians and others like them, as well as their modern counterparts representing every possible ethnic group of Nigeria. They should put together an enormous presentation exhibiting all cultures that would then make a massive tour of the country promoting cultural appreciation every where. This would definitely be an enormous endeavor, but I think it could be something that may attract financing from



international donor organizations. Presently, the arts are not well promoted in Nigeria, and so I think most artists of all kinds would be willing to be involved in something like this. If Nigeria can pull something like this off, it could be an incredible help to their international image as well as their national unity as Nigerians would become proud of their rich culture. National unity would in turn smoothen out much the nation's friction and pave the way for much more planned national, rather than regional, development.

Unfortunately, this national unity is no where close to being achieved, and so Nigeria is still torn apart by ethnic rivalries. Ever since independence, the government has tried to reduce these by increasing the number of states and local government areas so that every group has their own "headquarters." However, this just does not seem to work, because every time more states and local government areas are created, smaller and smaller groups begin to lobby for their own. One solution to this problem would be to scrap the states and instead create local government areas for every group to have at least one of their own. Then no one could complain that their ethnic group was an oppressed minority, as they would not be directly ruled by a larger group. Of course, an individual from one group living in the local government area of another would probably face discrimination, but nationally speaking, this may put an end to all the small minorities complaining about being oppressed. Each local government would elect one member to a national legislative body who would in turn select the head of state. This would be quite similar to the parliamentary system that the British left Nigeria at independence, only that this time it would be set up by Nigerians with a true understanding of the Nigerian context. Another solution would be to leave the states as they are and give them total control of all local affairs like finance, judiciary, police, telecommunications, industry, and agriculture. This way, Muslim states could use Islamic law, which they have tried to force on the entire country, Ibo's could have control over the oil that belongs to them anyway, etc... The national government would handle such things as the national debt, foreign affairs, and sports. All states would have to pay a certain amount to the federal government depending on their wealth, and these funds would be used to fund the national government and to assist many states with limited resources. This sort of thing would encourage states to develop on their own merit, rather than just sitting around and waiting for federal revenue. Oil states would be able to develop quickly as they would be the wealthiest, and other states would be forced to industrialize or find some other way to advance. Most of the money would then be handled by individual state governments, and therefore no one person at the top would be able to siphon off so much. Also, due to their smaller size, people dissatisfied with their state governments could get rid of them easier than they could a national tyrant. Obviously, this system would not at first promote



national unity, but I think it eventually will. People would direct their problems and their anger towards the state government, and the national government would become a symbol of national unity around which a national identity would evolve.

Religious strife is a potentially explosive problem in Nigeria. Again, the solution is simple. The Nigerian government has to stop supporting the Muslims whenever a religious problem comes up. In Nigeria's 33 years of independence, they have only been ruled by Christians for a total of 12 years. In the military, most of the soldiers are Christians, but a disproportionate amount of the officers are Muslims, and the list of inequalities goes on. For a while, the government had even gone so far as to join an international organization of Islamic countries and plans were in the works to scrap the federal law system for Islamic law. Here, for once, the Christians protested in mass, and the government had to relent. Christians in government themselves must do their part to bring their religion into politics as the Muslims do. This is something my father has been encouraging, but unfortunately the reformed view of transforming culture from within is not prevalent in Nigerian Christian circles. If the Christians in government did as much to promote Christianity and the advancement of Christians as the Muslims do for their religion and people, the balance of power between the two religious groups would be more equal. Without assurance that the government will side with them, the Muslims will be slower to attack Christians and their churches, and without the feeling that the government will go against them, the Christians will be quicker to fight back. Altogether, this would greatly reduce the nation's religious friction.

Overpopulation is a problem the government has attempted to combat, but without much vigor. The programs have been centered on the concept of child spacing rather than on reducing the number of children. This is a very good way to go about it in Nigeria. If you try to tell a man that he should not have so many children, he will not listen, because to most Nigerians, many children are still a sign of wealth. But, if you advise him to wait a few years before each child, he may listen without realizing that the wait reduces the number of children his wife can bear. Unfortunately, this campaign was not promoted very heavily, and it never took off. It was definitely in the right direction, as is the law of four children per wife, but to really make a difference, the government has to promote it very heavily until the idea gets ingrained. Again, an extensive campaign like this would be expensive, but this, like the cultural tour, seems like a candidate for foreign donations. It is sad to say, but overpopulation may soon be a problem of the past with the rise of AIDS in Nigeria. The government does not have the resources to fight AIDS, and the disease is spreading rapidly through heterosexual contacts. Chances are, AIDS could become as big



of a menace in Nigeria as it has been in places like Uganda. Let us just hope that this does not become the case, and that instead the government has to deal with overpopulation.

Without an end to corruption, there is really no viable solution to the problems of inadequate health and educational facilities. Without money, nothing can really be done. However, I would like to put forth some suggestions that may improve the situation a little. Regarding health care, Nigerians need to be encouraged to take advantage of the cheaper services offered by traditional healers. Many sicknesses have a psychological side to them as well, and traditionally healers understand this far better than doctors trained in Western medical practices. Because of this, traditional healers can often be more effective than medical doctors. Of course, there are many healers out there who are fakes, but if the government got involved in a program of licensing authentic traditional healers, and then encouraging people to use their services, the overburdened hospitals may get a rest. Again though, this is wide open to corruption. Government officials involved would give out licenses even to fakes for a big enough bribe. The educational system is a hopeless case. Teachers are not paid at all levels, and there are just not enough textbooks and classrooms for all the students. I really do not think there is much that can be done to improve the elementary and secondary educational system without a lot of money. My suggestion concerning education is directed towards universities. In the last ten or so years, countless new federal and state universities have sprung up in almost every state capital. The Ministry of Education way over extended themselves and can no longer fund the universities, which are basically free for those who get in. The result is that all the universities are in sad shape, and not even one is respectable any more. All I can suggest is that the Ministry of Education close down several of the new universities and direct their energies towards some of the older, established ones and bring them back up to a respectable level. This way, there would at least be a few good universities that students could rely on for a good education. It would limit even further the number of secondary school graduates who get into university, but at least those that do will not be wasting their time.

Ecological problems are not a priority in a poverty stricken nation like Nigeria. However, if the government totally ignores the ecological problems, things could be even worse in the future. The European Community is helping immensely in the attempt to stop the advance of the Sahara in the North, but it does not seem that much is being accomplished. The government needs to properly educate the people living in the areas near to the desert on how desertification happens. They also need to promote the planting of trees like the neem tree that grow very quickly even without much water and can be used to feed animals and provide fire wood. The increase in fuel prices has also brought



an increase to deforestation all over the country, not just in the arid North, because people must now rely on firewood to do their cooking since kerosene is too costly. Cutting down trees is bad enough, but even worse, the government does nothing to encourage replanting, which is another thing they must work on. They also need to promote tourism internationally to bring in funds to keep up Nigeria's diminishing forest areas and wildlife. Nigeria has much potential for tourism, but who wants to take a vacation to a country that hassles you every step of the way, from the minute you apply for a visa until you get back on the plane to go home? Again, due to mismanagement and corruption, these solutions will probably never bear fruit.

Finally, I have come to the last problem, the brain drain. I think Abacha has gone in the right direction by bringing several academics and highly skilled individuals into his cabinet. To prevent the loss of so much human potential, the Nigerian government must put its highly educated people into positions of influence so they can help rebuild Nigeria. Nigerians who do go abroad do not forget their country, but still send money home. Many of the ones I have talked with would much rather live in Nigeria, but it is just financially unfeasible. Thus, the government must also take advantage of all its highly educated citizens abroad. If the government would call on them to help, rather than condemning them for leaving, they might be able to a part of repairing Nigeria. I am presently a part of a group of about 90 Nigerians around the world who are starting an organization known as the Association of Nigerians Abroad. The purpose of the ANA will be to take advantage of the enormous potential of Nigerians abroad and join them together to help Nigeria forward. With an organization like this, Nigerians can live abroad, but still help their country. If things do get better back home, many of the people who left for financial reasons will willingly go home. This, I think is the only solution to the brain drain -- not to place guilt on people for escaping an impossible situation, but by getting their assistance from the outside to help improve Nigeria.

There you have it, the background, the problems, and the solutions. This is already quite long, but let me assure that it could be far longer if I really addressed everything that could be addressed. Nigeria is a very complex country. It is made up of people from up to 600 different ethnic groups who each want to control everyone else. It has so much potential, but all the wealth is being squandered. The first government fell to greed, and everyone else since then has as well, only now with the oil boom, on a grander scale. This widespread corruption and mismanagement have prevented Nigeria from becoming an economic miracle like South Korea and has turned it instead into one of the world's poorest nations. It is really strange how this could have happened. Nigerians are not stupid and politically uneducated. They saw everything fall apart before their eyes,



and rarely raised a finger to protest. They kept hoping for better days, again and again and again, but they still have not come. They have finally begun to stand up for themselves. The influence of labour and civil rights groups has sky rocketed, but it may be too late. Although Abacha's promise to hold a national convention to discuss Nigeria's future is promising, I am beginning to think that there is little room for optimism. Obasanjo's convention of the late 1970's led to the Shagari disaster. Babangida's convention of 1989 led to the recent failed attempt at returning to democracy. Nigeria needs to really search its soul over the next two months before this convention takes place so that the result will really be what is right for Nigeria. They must look into Nigeria's rich cultural heritage and find solutions from there, rather than from Western models. Whatever happens, the people must keep a keen eye on everything that happens and protest whenever a return to the old ways seems imminent. In 1985, Fela Kuti, Nigeria's foremost musician and governmental critic, said the following in his song Just Like That:

*"We in Africa we must start to think our own  
In our tradition where human beings and nature grows  
Where creativity and understanding must to be  
Right now, think now, fight now,  
Suffer must to stop."*

If you cannot understand what he is saying, it is along the lines of what I am saying. Africans must find solutions from the understanding of their traditions, and whatever happens, the suffering must stop. I really love Nigeria, and it hurts me to the bone when I see how such a potentially great nation is being ruined. I am very happy I had the opportunity to present the problems of Nigeria here. It does not get the press that Somalia and Angola do, because people do not realize how bad the situation is. Nigeria is a very independent country and likes to do things without outside intervention. Thus, its internal situation is not widely publicized internationally, even though Nigeria has a very free press. However, unless things turn around soon, Nigeria could quickly and easily become another Somalia in a civil war that would be bloodier, fiercer, and fought with more vigor than any war the world has yet seen. It is good to be able to let people realize where Nigeria is going, I think it helps a little. But still, the hours I have spent on this will do nothing to help the people starving in the crowded city slums of Abeokuta. The people in the villages like Baissa are still scratching out a meager existence from the pittance they are paid for their crop. In the end, the only thing any one can really do is cry to God and beg Him to have pity, for the people have already suffered too much.