

# Nigeria protests 'drug-pusher' label

by Lydia Cherry

At press conferences and in the U.S. establishment press itself, the Nigerian government has been pointing out the many inconsistencies and transparencies in the April 4 decision by the U.S. State Department and the Clinton administration to label Nigeria as top drug-trafficking country and place it next to Burma, Iran, and Syria on the list of nations which in the U.S. view have failed to cooperate in international drug-control efforts.

Nigeria's ambassador to the United States, Mallam Zubair Kazaure, told Washington-based reporters on May 4 that in the preceding three weeks he had repeatedly asked the State Department and the White House to provide names and evidence on any Nigerian official who is thought to be involved in drug trafficking, but that they have given him absolutely nothing. Ambassador Kazaure emphasized the importance of the United States rescinding this decertification of Nigeria. On the basis of this decision, "the United States can take any action it wants against Nigeria." He also pointed out that the sanctions against Nigeria that accompany the decertification would have the opposite effect of their supposed intent. "Such sanctions would aggravate economic problems, encourage drug trafficking, and possibly cause instability."

The Nigerian government is certainly not denying the existence of criminal elements in the country who engage in drug trafficking. However, Nigeria vehemently denies that that somehow reflects government policy. Drug traffickers gained a foothold in Nigeria during the mid-1980s. Not coincidentally, in the same 10-year period, under the International Monetary Fund's model, per capita income decreased by more than 75%. Therefore, in Nigeria, as in country after country, the IMF model has spurred drug-trafficking. The U.S. charges of drug-trafficking, however, were not leveled at Nigeria so long as the country was dutifully playing out the role of a supposed IMF "success story."

In his first response to the U.S. action, Head of State Gen. Sani Abacha pointed out the economic dimension by noting that "the criminal elements who engage in drug trafficking are victims lured by the money offered by the European and American drug syndicates who control the production, trafficking, and street-level distribution of the drugs."

Even before the drug charge was leveled, the country was faced with an unprecedented anti-Nigerian press barrage in the United States and Britain, which seemed to follow upon Abacha's decision to pull the country back from the IMF model. On May 2, Nigeria published a full one-page advertisement in the *Washington Post*, to detail the various anti-drug programs in Nigeria, and to cite the number of drug traffickers arrested and amount of drugs seized. It says that in recognition of Nigeria's anti-drug efforts, "the International Drug Abuse Prevention in Schools [program] has recently appointed a Nigerian to coordinate drug abuse control activities for all of Africa."

## U.S. case is a sham

As Ambassador Kazaure explained at the National Press Club: "Nigeria has been closely cooperating with the United States and other countries in this endeavor [the war against drugs], as confirmed by the U.S. State Department in a seminar organized by the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington D.C. on March 3, 1993." He added: "Nigeria was praised by the Department of State for a recent drug seizure which the department described as the largest ever in Africa. The United States International Narcotics Center Strategy Report of 1993 states clearly on page 433 that the Nigerian government does not, as a matter of policy, facilitate the production and distribution of drugs or encourage money laundering. On page 436, it says there was improvement in the level of drug cooperation between Nigeria and the United States. The same report refers to successful joint operations between the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) and the Nigerian National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA)."

In light of what the U.S.-Nigerian government cooperation has historically been in attempting to thwart this menace, Ambassador Kazaure called on the United States to look at the situation rationally. "Combatting drug trafficking is not easy; it is no less difficult than stopping drugs from entering the United States and western European countries. Despite thorough searches with the most sophisticated equipment at the ports of entry, drug traffickers still find their way into these countries." Granted, the world community as a whole has bitterly failed in stopping the drug trade, Kazaure said, but "surely, just because the other side has scored a goal, the captain should not punish his hard-playing team-mates by injuring and incapacitating them, *if the real aim is to win.*"

Moreover, nobody has raised the question why the United States has not imposed sanctions against itself, when U.S. government figures have placed illegal domestic marijuana production at over \$50 billion a year, and when prominent American political institutions, such as the Inter-American Dialogue, openly peddle a strategy for the legalization of all illegal drugs. The United States is still providing half of the entire revenue to the international drug cartels, at a staggering rate of nearly \$500 billion a year.