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## Interview: Alhaji Abiola Ogundokun

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# We have succeeded in achieving peace

*Alhaji Abiola Ogundokun is a delegate to the National Constitutional Conference and Yoruba chief from Osun state. He was interviewed by Uwe Friesecke in Abuja on April 26.*

**EIR:** Chief, could you tell us, as a member of the Constitutional Conference, how you see the accomplishments of this conference, and the significance of the report you will now submit to the federal government?

**Ogundokun:** The most successful achievement of this conference is the success in achieving peace. At the time we came into the conference, Nigeria was about to disintegrate. Gen. Sani Abacha has helped us to find a solution to leadership problems, the problems of rivalry, jealousy, mistrust; this has been taken care of through the decision of the conference to go for a rotational Presidency. The suspicions between the south and the north for a long time have been very, very tense. With the consensus of the members, we have been able to reach a solution, to find a lasting answer to most of the problems.

These are the main two important things: This conference has helped to stabilize Nigeria under the present military administration; and it has been possible for this administration to ensure that the suspicion and mistrust among the rank and file of society has been removed, thanks to the rotational Presidency.

The thing that I would say is the most important achievement, is the fact that for the first time, Nigerians are going back home with one voice, rather than divided feelings. I would say that this is due to the good position of the government, particularly the head of state, who has refused to intervene in the process of lawmaking and discussion at the conference. The government does not get involved in any manner. I cannot think of any past constitutional confab that has not been interfered with. I was a member of the Constitutional Assembly of 1977; I can remember what happened then. And for now, I think we have to congratulate this administration, for the manner in which they have handled the Constitutional Conference.

**EIR:** How would you respond to international critics who say that the Constitutional Conference is just a cover for the military to not give up power?

**Ogundokun:** The problem with the international community condemning the position of Nigeria on the Constitutional Conference is due to lack of information, lack of education, lack of knowledge of the actual situation on the ground. You can talk to a gentleman like President Jimmy Carter, who came to Nigeria, saw it himself, and said that Americans have been misinformed about the facts on the ground, as they affect the Nigerian situation. He went on to say that Nigeria would survive the crisis, because he believes in the Constitutional Conference.

If you leave this country and you read the newspapers, you find out that they are all sponsored criticisms. They are sponsored in order to satisfy different interests; you can never get the truth. The campaign against Nigeria is designed to destabilize Nigeria. It is designed to destroy Nigeria, for the purpose of taking the resources, so that Nigeria will not be stable, will not be at peace. So, it is a sponsored campaign, designed to achieve certain ambitions of those that are responsible for destabilizing society. Gen. Sani Abacha has been up to the task; he has been very quiet, very careful in his approach.

You are here, you have seen it for yourself. We are at peace; we love this government; anything you see against this government is sponsored by the minority group that wants to force their own will on the majority. This is not possible; democracy demands that the majority have the final say.

**EIR:** Could you highlight for us the most important changes in this Constitution, compared to the 1979 Constitution, and what you think may be a critical advancement over earlier constitutions in Nigeria's history?

**Ogundokun:** As I said before, the rotational Presidency is a completely new thing in our system, which now guarantees leadership opportunity to every sector of our society. It has now been made possible that even minority groups in Nigeria could have the opportunity of taking over leadership. When you say the thing goes to the south, only the southern groups can present candidates; no northern candidate will emerge for the office.

Another issue is the revenue formula, which has been carefully taken care of; this is another area that is really going to solve the problems of Nigerians.

This is all to the surprise of those who said the Constitutional Conference would not work. Now you see that even they are singing praises, because of some laudable decisions taken by the confab. This includes the issue of the chieftancy offices: Our tradition has a place, because they have an office, a more recognized position, they are given functions compared with the past; whereas in the past, the position of the traditional leaders was destroyed. Where there is no leadership, there is a problem. The traditional kings and chiefs will now have a function in government.

**EIR:** If you look around in Africa—Rwanda, Burundi, Li-

beria, Sierre Leone, all trouble spots, sometimes violence, wars—do you see a role for Nigeria in helping build a better future for Africa as a whole?

**Ogundokun:** Yes. Most of these troubles are internationally sponsored and financed. Africans do not really have the intention of fighting among themselves. But the external, powerful forces have the financial and economic power to sabotage the efforts of the developing nations. How do they do it? They find out that if we are united, they will not be able to achieve the control which they have been dreaming about. . . .

**EIR:** Recently, when there was the attempted coup in Nigeria, there was also an activation of a U.S.-based group called TransAfrica, which is heavily funded by the Ford Foundation and the British. They are now campaigning actively, and they held a demonstration last week at the Nigerian Embassy, saying that sanctions must be placed on Nigeria, and that Sani Abacha and the military must immediately hand over power to civilians. Having been through almost a year now of the National Constitutional Conference, discussing the issues of civilian rule and democracy, how do you answer Randall Robinson and TransAfrica?

**Ogundokun:** Robinson is a personal friend of Chief M.K.O. Abiola. His main interest is to see Abiola back in power. Where was Robinson in 1983, when the Army took over power from Shagari? Why did he not come out and campaign for Shagari? Why is he now just interested in the 1993 election? Because he is dancing to the tune of his masters, his friends—he wants his friend in power.

He is not in Nigeria; he cannot know better than a Nigerian what is going on here. He should come here, to see what is on the ground. For him to be championing the cause of democracy and civilian rule in Nigeria, he must first understand the true position of the country. He is working for money: I am saying that, because if he is not working for money, he should come here, study the situation, like President Carter came, and like some parliamentary people came. If Carter could say that Americans are being misinformed about Nigeria, then Robinson must be talking rubbish. The campaign of Robinson is not a campaign of honesty, but a campaign of destruction, designed to satisfy his masters and to get his friend into power.

The 1993 elections were an inconclusive election. The results have not been announced. There is an electoral law, defied by Abiola himself on Election Day, which forbids you from wearing your party emblem at the polling station—which Abiola did. He would not have been declared elected by anybody. So what are we making noise about? It was an inconclusive election. I know the other candidate; Bashir Tofa was out. They took Abiola's photograph, because he defied the law which has to do with electioneering. There was wanton use of bribery for the election, which is one of the reasons that the former President annulled the election.

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## Interview: Chief Emea Udu Oji

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# Our key problem is the unity of Nigeria

*Chief Udu Oji is a delegate to the National Constitutional Conference from Abia state. He was interviewed by Uwe Friesecke on April 26 in Abuja, Nigeria.*

**EIR:** Could you give us your view of the work of the National Constitutional Conference?

**Udu Oji:** I would describe the Constitutional Conference as a coming together of minds, people from different professions, from different experiences, old and young. The problem of Nigerian unity is what knocks the country right, left, and center, and I would say that in our practices and our deliberations, we saw that the unity of this country comes first and foremost. As an individual, sometimes I have been very critical of north, east, west, or south, and that is where the problem of this country comes in. As for the conference, we did as much as we could to make sure that we would talk together as Nigerians, and not as Yorubans or Ibos. I think this is one of the best jobs that the conference tried to do.

The problem of this country is uneven development. The problem of this country is with the politicals, the military, with ourselves. Under it is the canker of corruption. You see it all over: with the Army, with the politicals, with the police, with the businessmen.

As for the writing of the Constitution, sometimes I regard it as a tongue-twisting exercise, because it is not the Constitution that is holding the country back; it is the government.

We have tried to educate the people about what our problems are, and tried to offer solutions.

**EIR:** You said the most important thing was that people came together as Nigerians. How would you define the essence of being a Nigerian? How would you define the character of Nigeria as a nation?

**Udu Oji:** During colonial days, sometimes we saw the British as somebody we thought was [our enemy], and we tried to come together. But when the common enemy, the person we regarded as our enemy, was away, then the problem became ourselves. In 1954, when they had elections in the west, in Yoruba land, Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe did win an election, but because he was not from that group, he was refused! These have been our problems, before independence. These are the aspects of our life that we really would like to change, and that is what the Constitutional Conference is trying to achieve.