

Nigeria Is On a Dangerous Path

by Lawrence K. Freeman

Is Nigeria, the most populated nation in Africa, on the verge of national disintegration? This is the dangerous question that emerges from discussions with two leading Nigerians in recent months. Major General Muhammadu Buhari, the Presidential candidate for the All Peoples Nigerian Party in the 2003 election, when speaking in Washington on April 7, said: “An unstable Nigeria driven by internal wars, insurrections, or other manifestations of a failed state, has the potential to destabilize the whole continent of Africa.” And Professor Sam Aluko, the well-known Nigerian economist, who has represented a unique counterpole to the International Monetary Fund/World Bank free-trade policies for decades, provided a clear picture of the deterioration of the Nigerian economy for the last five years under the Presidency of Gen. Olusegun Obasanjo (see *Interview* following).

Poverty Leads to Violence

Professor Aluko and General Buhari confirmed what *EIR* has reported for years. Despite all the fanfare about the “democratization” of Nigeria with 1999 election of President

Obasanjo, the conditions of life for 130 million Nigerians have only worsened since then, with an estimated 91 million (70%) of the people living in poverty. There is no manufacturing industry to speak of in Nigeria. The majority of the population, trying to scratch out an existence, are forced to act like beasts of burden, either in the so-called informal economy, or in backward peasant-type agriculture labor.

As Aluko insightfully points out, the root cause of the so-called ethnic and religious confrontations bedeviling Nigeria—such as those in which thousands of Muslims and Christians have brutally massacred each other in the states of Kano and Plateau in the first two weeks of May—is the extreme economically depressed living conditions for the overwhelming majority of Nigerians.

The level of violence, stealing, and murder has also escalated, along with revolts against the government in various parts of country. While outside orchestration of such “ethnic-religious” clashes is by no means to be ruled out, the “dry tinder” required to ignite the fire of wanton killing is the deep cultural pessimism already affecting the population. Denied the opportunity to earn even a minimal economic sustenance to provide for a family and have a meaningfully productive life, desperate people resort to bestial acts of violence.

Nigerians were promised and expected “democracy dividends” in 1999, when President Obasanjo was first elected as the preferred candidate of Britain and the United States, after the mysterious deaths of two entrenched opponents, General Sani Abacha and Chief M.K.O. Abiola. Obasanjo’s re-election in 2003, with a claimed two-thirds of the vote, met a hail of accusations of vote fraud, and has been brought before

the Nigerian Supreme Court by General Buhari. Beyond that: Is it truthful, or mere sophistry, to discuss ushering in an era of “democracy” after decades of military rule, when citizens lack even the basic necessities of life—clean water, continuous electricity, a minimal standard of decent housing, any semblance of health care, or education? On top of poor quality compulsory lower education, approximately 80% of Nigerian university students have been deprived of instruction by the shutdown of colleges due to strikes and the shortage of operating funds.

This horrendous situation is not unique to Nigeria. All of sub-Saharan Africa has been in an accelerated process of devolution. Globalization, the modern term for the predatory doctrine of free trade, has, not surprisingly, failed to improve one African economy. Absent from the various seminars, and polite—but insincere—lectures about Af-



“The root cause of the so-called ethnic and religious confrontations bedeviling Nigeria is the extreme economically-depressed living conditions for the overwhelming majority.” Here, Nigerians eke out a small income by collecting wood to be resold as fuel for cooking in urban areas.