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COMMITTEE FOR ACADEMIC FREEDOM IN AFRICA

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Introduction

The violations of human rights perpetrated by the Nigerian Government under General Babangida first and now under his successor General Abacha have received some publicity lately in the U.S. press, particularly after the decision of the Black Caucus to campaign in Washington for an embargo on Nigerian oil. However, there has been no mention of the abuses which the Nigerian Government has condoned or commanded on the country's campuses, where for years now a reign of intimidation and even outright terror has prevailed.

A welcome exception to this silence was the protest letter sent to General Abacha by the President of African Studies Association (ASA) in the latest ASA bulletin which, we hope, will contribute to make our North American colleagues aware of the degree to which our support for Nigerian teachers and students is needed. In this issue of the CAFA Newsletter we continue to document the troubled situation of Nigerian universities, focusing upon the University-wide teachers strike and the violent attacks by the police force on the students of Edo State University.

In this issue we also publish edited versions of two papers presented at the ASA conference in November 1994 in Toronto. The first paper is by Attahiru Jega, former head of the Nigerian university teachers' union, the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU). Jega gives an overview of the Nigerian university system and faculty struggles for academic freedom and university autonomy against the government and its IMF/World Bank-inspired "vision" of university life. The second paper by Alamin Mazrui and Willy Mutunga discusses the Kenyan university teachers' union, the Universities Academic Staff Union (UASU), and the vicissitudes of its bitter struggle for the registration of the union.

The last part of this issue presents our campaign for a World Bank-free ASA. Our campaign was inspired by multiple reasons. These include: (a) the nature of the World Bank as a profit-making organization; (b) its role in the decline of education in Africa; (c) its silence on the violations of academic freedom perpetrated by African governments to whom it gives loans; (d) its record of using ASA conferences for self-advertisement and self-promotion, while masquerading as a scholarly enterprise.

We must add, in this context, that we were badly surprised to see at the last ASA conference held in Toronto, that not only the World Bank was unproblematically invited; but so were representatives of the American military and intelligence agencies, who again participated not as individuals but as employees of these organizations. There should be no doubt that their presence is a violation of academic freedom since it can hardly be argued that the free flow of ideas is not hampered by the presence of institutions which can beckon armies in support of their views. Moreover, if the U.S. government and the World Bank can present panels in their names at the ASA what can prevent other governments and banks to use the ASA in a similar way? We urge, therefore, our colleagues to join our petition campaign to the ASA, to ensure that in the future the panels organized for the annual ASA conference are not instrumentalized to promote the agendas of these institutions.

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