EDWIN MADUNAGU

FREEDOM WATCH

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LET REASON PREVAIL

That Nigeria is a country under siege is apt and incontrovertible. Its political history since independence in 1960 has been characterised by an avalanche of political tragedies. Avoidable tragedies caused by a tiny clique of civilian and military political adventurers.

The Nigerian military in its self-assigned task of being the messiah of the people and in its pretensions to save the country from total wreckage has over time become an army of occupation in its management of the affairs of the nation.

Having enjoyed the pomp of political rulership and having used same for personal enrichment, the Nigerian military has become stubbornly determined not to let go its hold on political power. The fleeting breath of democracy which the nation experienced during the Second Republic between 1979 and 1983 taxed the patience of the military and the noble gesture of General Olusegun Obasanjo who handed over power to a democratically elected government then is being regarded as an aberration which the Nigerian military is determined not to repeat.

Every military coup d'état in Nigeria has been heralded with a national broadcast painstakingly crafted to rationalise the unconstitutional act of the military in subverting the democratic process. A pathetic picture of a distressed nation in desperate need of a saviour is painted. Such broadcasts often end with pleas for the understanding of the citizenry and promises of a soonest to come Eldorado.

With the abundance of economic resources available, Nigeria could as well be an Eldorado capable of being effortlessly transformed into a paradise on earth if these resources are judiciously managed by honest and patriotic persons. Ironically, these abundant economic resources have become the bane of Nigeria.

Massive corruption and reckless stealing of public funds have been identified as the major reasons for the insatiable craving for political power by the Nigerian military officers. Since by the nature of their attainment of political rulership they are answerable to nobody ,they always want to have their ways. Even in the face of glaring evidence of culpable misappropriation of public funds, the military invokes the much abused *espirit de corps* to protect its own. The few occasions when punitive measures were taken, such have been known to have been either a far cry from the magnitude of the offences committed or were later reversed in favour of the culprits. An example is the case of some military officers who served as military governors of some states during General Yakubu Gowon's regime and were found to have used their offices to illegally enrich themselves. The decision to confiscate the property corruptly acquired by them was reversed about ten years later by General Ibrahim Babangida who returned the dubiously acquired property to the erstwhile military officers. There is no better way of encouraging official corruption.

This horrible state of things persisted in the first instance for 13 years (1966 - 1979) uninterrupted and now for another 15 years (1983 - ?). The aberration of military dictatorship has become a matter of course with a disturbing rampancy of coup and counter coup.

The successful execution of a coup plot is immediately followed by the announcement of the suspension of the Constitution of the Federal Republic while decrees made by military fiat are issued at the whims and caprices of the coupists. The rule of law is thus bastardised.

It is therefore not by accident that Nigeria now parades a judiciary that is in tatters. While lawlessness and above-the-law syndrome are exhibited by even the lowest in ranks among Nigerian military men, the ordinary citizen reaps unquantifiable agonies from the tragedy. The law courts which are supposed to be the last hope for the citizens have become malleable tools for perpetrating injustice by the military with the active connivance of some judges of these courts. Lawyers are being daily frustrated in the practice of their profession as it has almost become an established norm that any issue of litigation in which the state is interested can hardly be determined in favour of the citizen or other parties to the case, even when there is an overwhelming availability of evidence that dictate otherwise. On rare occasions when cases are determined in favour of citizens, such judgments are treated with utter disdain by officers or agents of the regime so affected. The rule of law has been grossly subverted and rendered ineffectual by the Nigerian military autocrats.

On November 17, 1993 General Sani Abacha declared himself the maximum ruler of the country pronouncing an insincere mission to correct the injustice of the annulment of the June 12, 1993 presidential election won by Chief M.K.O Abiola.

From that fateful day, it has become a bad dream come true for Nigerians. The infantry army general who is a veteran of many coups d'état did not waste time in baring his fangs and has amply demonstrated his lack of respect for the laws of the land and the fundamental rights of the citizens.

It is no exaggeration to state here that Nigerians are having their worst political and socio-economic experience under the regime of General Sani Abacha. Save for the tiny clique of political adventurers in the military and their civilian acolytes, all other segments of the Nigerian society have become victims of the tyranny of the junta .

While the economy ails and life becomes more unbearable for the citizens daily, the unabashed looting of the treasury is being carried on by the power wielders with reckless abandon. Things have become so bad that the country can be likened to a person that is terminally ill because all components of the body have broken down. Galloping inflation, multiple taxation and unemployment have further compounded the plight of the citizens.

Infrastructures which are supposed to make life easy for the people are either dilapidated, inadequate or non-existent. Electricity supply to most communities is epileptic and in some places, the mere malfunctioning of a transformer is enough to herald months of living in darkness. In spite of this, the National Electric Power Authority (NEPA) in charge of electricity supply keeps bringing exorbitant bills and hiking its charges for ineffective services or for services not rendered. Those whose professions or trade depend solely on electricity like hairdressers, welders, proprietors of barbing salons, repairers of refrigerators and other electronics e.t.c have resorted to purchasing generators to retain and guarantee their source of livelihood.

The network of roads all over the country have become death traps. Tolls are collected on all these roads and in some cases, the charges are absurd but the roads remain in a state of perpetual disrepair. Pipe-borne hygienic water has become an exclusive preserve of dwellers in a few cities in the country. The few who can afford it have resorted to sinking bore-holes in their residence while those who cannot make do with unhygienic water from wells, streams and rivers.

Above all, there is the serious problem of urban violence and armed robbery attacks which the Nigeria Police Force is ill-equipped to combat. Instead of addressing the problem in practical and concrete terms, security squads with code names ranging from the bizarre to the weird are being set up to terrorise the innocent citizens.

If there is any sector of our national life that has suffered set backs of erstwhile unimaginable magnitude, it is education. The tales of woes from the campuses of our educational institutions are enough to make one's heart bleed.

Facilities are in acute shortage and infrastructures are derelict. Most tertiary institutions cannot boast of modern facilities and the environment has become too inclement for any serious academic endeavour to take place there. Lecturers are trooping to other countries in hordes for better remuneration and more alluring academic environment resulting in a dearth of competent personnel in these institutions.

The military regime has also embarked on a policy of commercialisation of education. Fees of different kinds are being charged in schools. In a situation where many parents are unemployed and those who have jobs to their names are not well remunerated, eking out a living has become a most arduous task. Most parents who cannot afford the prohibitive fees have unavoidably taken the painful decision of withdrawing their children and wards from the schools. This generation of youths being callously denied education may end up as miscreants and social misfits putting the health of the society in jeopardy in future.

Development levies are charged in primary and secondary schools while it costs an average of Five Thousand Naira for a child to enrol for the Senior Secondary School Certificate Examinations. In the tertiary institutions, a student needs not less than Eighty Thousand Naira per session to survive on the campus. Concomitant with these hardships is the desecration of the erstwhile sacredness of the institutions by General Sani Abacha.

In a needless display of retrogressive politicking, General Sani Abacha appointed **Major General Mamman Kotangora(rtd)** as the sole-administrator of Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria in November 1995. Today, that aberration is fast gaining prominence as other institutions of learning are being subjected to the ordeal of being administered by sole-administrators.

The patriotic efforts of lecturers and students to protect the institutions and by inference the future of the country have pitched them in battle against the military regime on different levels. Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU), Academic Staff Union of Polytechnics (ASUP) and the National Association of Nigerian Students (NANS) have either been banned or their ranks infiltrated by agents of the junta to render them impotent. The ASUU strike of 1996 lasted for 7 months and the junta through its education minister threatened to close down the universities for 2 years if the strike was not called off. The schools are open today but they are a far cry from what they were before the November 17, 1993 national disaster and what they should be.

The health care delivery system is terrible. Hospitals have become mortuaries since drugs are not available and qualified medical doctors and paramedical personnel are leaving the country for other lands in search of better pay. It is pathetic to note that erstwhile conquered diseases that have been banished to the garbage of medical history are back with us. Cholera alone claimed thousands of lives between 1993 and 1997 while Cerebro Meningitis took its toll in large measures too. The resurgence of these diseases speaks volumes of the standard of the health care delivery system of General Abacha's regime. This is inspite of the fat budgetary allocation to the health sector and the orchestrated but insincere effort of the Petroleum Trust Fund (PTF) - a parallel government where General Muhammadu Buhari (rtd), a former military dictator, reigns supreme.

Most embarrassing is the recurring incident of fuel scarcity in the country. Nigeria is the world's sixth largest producer of crude oil. While countries not blessed with the black gold are not hit by fuel shortage, the shameful phenomenon has become a regular feature of life in Nigeria. Even though there had been instances of fuel scarcity in the past, it was often for a few days but never for months like the one the country is being treated to under General Sani Abacha when for weeks on end, social and commercial activities are paralysed for lack of fuel. By September 1997 when a brand of toxic fuel hit the market, polluting the environment, destroying engines of vehicles and ulti-

mately claiming the lives of some citizens, the point became clearly made that the citizens' sufferings have no bound under General Sani Abacha.

At the international level, Nigeria has become the laughing stock of other nations. Prominent Nigerians have expressed deep concern over General Sani Abacha's infinite capacity for attracting negative publicity to himself and bringing the country to ridicule.

In July 1993, it was General Sani Abacha, then the Chief of Defence Staff of the Nigerian army that ordered the mass killing of citizens who protested peacefully the annulment of the presidential election. The same year, he forcibly took over the political leadership of the country. In 1994, he arrested and has kept in captivity ever since, Chief M.K.O. Abiola, the president-elect whose mandate he stole.

In 1995 it was a phantom coup plot saga. It took all pleas from the international community to save, at least for then, the lives of the alleged plotters. Hardly had the dust raised by this settled down than General Sani Abacha shocked the world with the judicial murder of the erudite writer and environmental activist, Ken Saro-Wiwa and eight of his Ogoni kinsmen. Throughout 1996, the regime was either making frivolous allegations against other countries or pouring vitriols on international personalities both at home and abroad through its voluble Minister of foreign affairs, Tom Ikimi and the then irrascible Minister of information, Walter Ofonagoro.

To all the atrocities being committed against the citizens and the tragedies this regime is foisting on the nation, General Sani Abacha has just one answer - the transition programme.

Well-meaning Nigerians and human rights/pro-democracy organisations have been shouting themselves hoarse warning General Sani Abacha that his unpopular transition programme is destined to fail.

The Nigerian political impasse on account of which General Sani Abacha came into power has continued to worsen at an alarming rate as the country sinks deeper into crisis.

Democracy is in the gulag while wielders of stolen power keep the citizens in bondage. The winner of the historic presidential election of June 12, 1993, Chief M.K.O. Abiola has been in detention since 1994 for claiming his legitimate mandate freely given to him by Nigerians. Pa Alfred Rewane and Alhaja Kudirat Abiola were assassinated in circumstances widely believed to have been politically motivated and state-organised. Chief Anthony Enahoro, the man who moved the motion for the nation's independence, Prof. Wole Soyinka, a Nobel Laureate, Lt. General Alani Akinrinade, a former Chief of Army Staff and a host of others have been driven into exile. The Press is being repressed while General Olusegun Obasanjo, the only military ruler in Nigeria to have ever conducted a successful transition to civil rule is in detention. Same goes for Dr. Beko Ransome-Kuti and others purportedly convicted on allegation of plotting a phantom coup. The sun set for General Shehu Musa Yar'Adua at mid-day courtesy of General Sani Abacha's gulag. The controversy trailing the creation of new local governments in 1996 by the junta has continued to take tolls in human lives unabated.

Bomb blasts believed to be fallouts of the lingering political crisis have been rocking the nation. To end the year 1997, the junta again alleged another coup plot purportedly planned against it by the Chief of General Staff and the number two man of the junta, Lt. General Oladipo Diya and others. General Sani Abacha has successfully turned Nigeria to one large prison yard where all citizens without exemption have become prisoners groaning, wailing and dying. General Sani Abacha too has become a victim of his tyranny and his self-induced feeling of insecurity has turned him a prisoner in his lair, the presidential Villa Abuja, where he hardly ventures out.

The greatest concern of all patriotic Nigerians is General Sani Abacha's intransigence to a peaceful resolution of the political crisis. In spite of all entreaties and pleas to him to release all political prisoners and allow for a genuine transition programme to be organised, General Sani Abacha is rigidly committed to the execution of his unpopular transition programme in which he wants to succeed himself as the next civilian president.

This unjustifiable and unacceptable ambition of General Sani Abacha has today become the greatest threat to the corporate existence of the country as an entity. It does not only portend a great danger to Nigeria but it is also capable of eroding for all times the little confidence and the slender hope the citizens have left in the country.

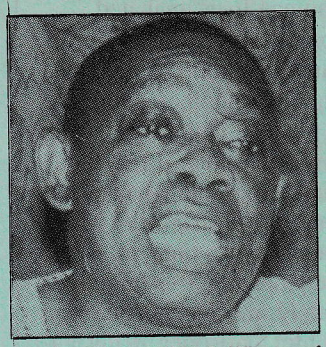
There are two options open to Nigeria and unfortunately General Sani Abacha is the one to choose. One is the peaceful resolution of the lingering political crisis through an immediate and unconditional release of Chief M.K.O Abiola and all other political prisoners and the formation of a government of national unity which shall convoke a Sovereign National Conference (SNC) where all pending issues shall be amicably resolved and a popular transition programme organised thereafter. The other is for General Sani Abacha to go against all advice, pleas and reason and stubbornly pursue his ambition by succeeding himself as the next civilian president come October 1998.

The former is the popular wish of the people and an automatic guarantee of peace, harmony and socio-economic advancement while if the latter becomes the choice of General Sani Abacha, poets should immediately go to work and compose elegies for Nigeria. **Freedom Watch** sincerely hopes that reason will prevail and the forseeable fallouts of General Sani Abacha's ambition could be avoided.

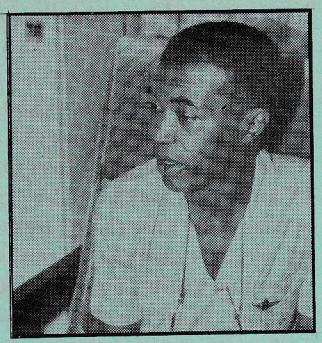
We therefore call on all patriotic Nigerians both at home and abroad to be more resolute and more determined in our efforts to free ourselves from the gulag of the Nigerian military dictators.

The task of freeing our beloved country from the bondage of military dictatorship is one that cannot be compromised and must be achieved at all cost. This much we owe posterity.

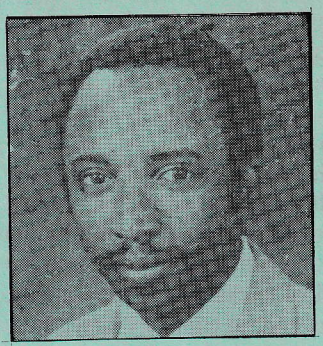
FREE THEM NOW !



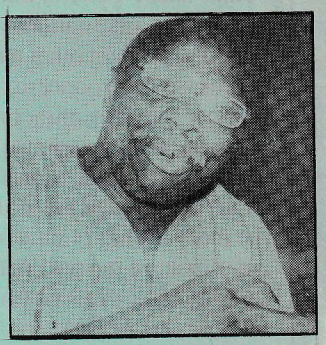
CHIEF M.K.O. ABIOLA, Winner of June 12 1993 presidential election, detained since 23/6/94 on trumped-up Treason charges.



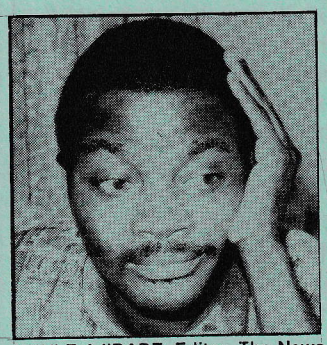
DR BEKO RANSOME-KUTI, Chairman CD, detained since 28/7/95 and jailed for alleged involvement in a purported coup plot.



SHEHU SANNI, Nat. Vice-chairman CD, detained since 10/3/95 and jailed for alleged involvement in a purported coup plot.



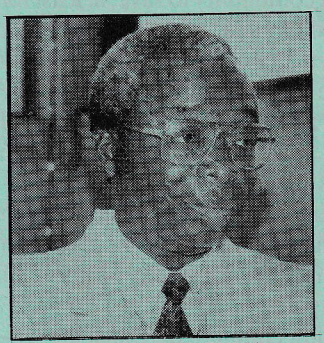
GEN. OLUSEGUN OBASANJO (rtd), Nigeria's former head of state 1976 - '79, detained since 13/3/95 and jailed for alleged involvement in a purported coup plot.



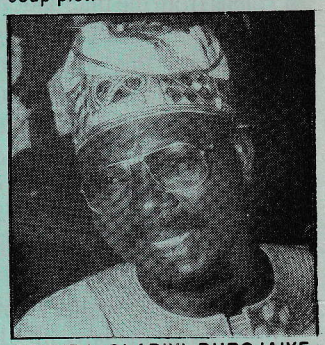
KUNLE AJIBADE, Editor, The News magazine detained since 23/5/95 and jailed for alleged involvement in a purported coup plot.



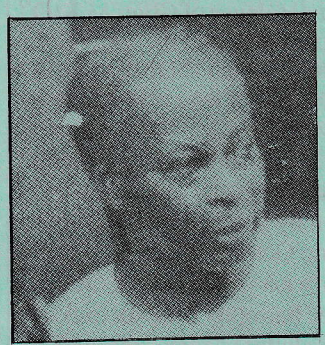
MS CHRIS ANYANWU, Publisher, TSM magazine, detained since 6/4/95 and jailed for alleged involvement in a purported coup plot.



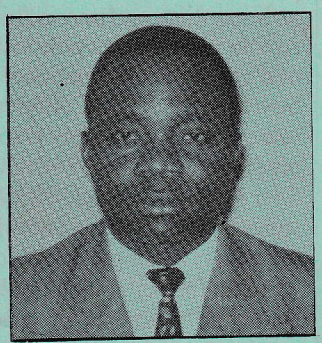
DR. FREDRICK FASEHUN, pro-democracy activist detained since 18/12/96 and charged in connection with bomb blasts.



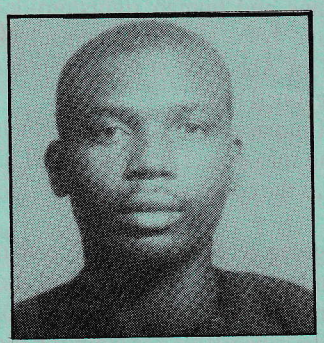
OTUNBA OLABIYI DUROJAIYE, former SDP presidential aspirant, detained since Deceber 3, 1996.



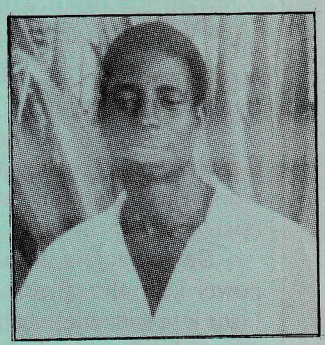
CHIEF OLU FALAE, former Minister of Finance and Secretary to the Federal Military Government detained since 16/1/97 and charged in connection with bomb blasts.



SOJI OMOTUNDE, Editor African Concord magazine, held since October 25, 1997.



EBUN-OLU ADEGBORUWA, Human rights activist and Lawyer in Chief Gani Fawehinmi's Chambers, held since November 4, 1997.



OGAGA IFOWODO, Annual Report Project Officer of Civil Liberties Organisation (CLO), held since November 7, 1997.

These persons and many others are prisoners of conscience!
Demand for the immediate and unconditional release of all political prisoners now!!

MILITARY RULE IS A CRIME AGAINST HUMANITY !

WE MUST CHASE OUT THE ENEMY OF THE PEOPLE AND FIGHT FOR THE IMMEDIATE RESTORATION OF DEMOCRACY !!

FREEDOM WATCH IS PUBLISHED MONTHLY BY THE COMMITTEE FOR THE DEFENCE OF HUMAN RIGHTS (CDHR), PLOT 9, LADIPO OLUWOLE STREET, OFF ADENIYI JONES AVENUE, P.O. BOX 46028 (BQ) IKEJA - LAGOS, NIGERIA
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