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WHY ABACHA MUST NOT BE PRESIDENT

There are very many things wrong with the proposal being made by certain irresponsible and opportunistic Nigerians that General Sani Abacha should convert himself into a civilian president of Nigeria. One of these is the fact that General Abacha became Head of State without the consent of the Nigerian people and he has participated many times in forcible and illegal seizure of power from democratically elected representatives of the Nigerian people. Secondly, a President-elect exists and is in the custody of General Sani Abacha's regimen. Thirdly, the so called Transition Programme under which General Abacha is being asked to transform into a Civilian President is totally flawed, immoral and moribund. Fourthly, General Sani Abacha's government is a model of tragic failure, so far, it has only implemented socio-economic policies destructive of the welfare of the masses of the working people, peasant, the unemployed etc. In the fifth place, the Abacha dictatorship represents the limits of decay in public morality, corruption, arbitrariness in decision-making processes, sychophancy, self-promotion and civil personality cult. Sixthly, there is no time in the history of Nigeria in which the Nigerian public and individuals have been victimised by summary arrests/ detention, judicial murder, death in custody and general abuse of civil liberties, as under Abacha's regime: Only the praise-singers of the dictatorship are free.



In the seventh place, the foreign policy of Nigeria has never been disastrous and contradictory as in the last five years. While intervening in other neighbouring countries "to restore democracy" and participating in international peace keeping operations, the regime is fighting with the international community for insisting that democracy must be restored to Nigeria.

Should Nigeria honour coup plotters with Presidency under a democratic dispensation?

Both civilians and members of the armed forces have insisted consistently that **coups d'etat** must be banished because forceful overthrow of elected governments are illegal. On many occasions, in the history of Nigeria, many (alleged) coup-plotters have been executed. Even now, a military tribunal is trying some alleged coup plotters. Under the Abacha dictatorship, the coup trial is the second!

General Sani Abacha has participated in coups and served regimes that came to power through violent seizure of power. Therefore he cannot be trusted to observe the rules of democratic governance and he should consequently be told that he cannot succeed himself as a civilian president. Indeed any military officer, or any Nigerian for that matter, who takes a political job under a military dictatorship has a moral responsibility to disqualify himself from politics under democratic rule.

The argument by pro-Abacha campaigners that he (Abacha) is not the first military man to become Civilian President is a fraudulent act aimed at deceiving the people. De Gaule and Eisenhower, who, we are told, were military generals that became Presidents in their respective countries did not stage coups. They did not preside over transition programmes in their transformation from generals to democratically elected civilian presidents. Rather, they left the army, they formed or joined political parties, contested with others and were elected presidential candidates of their parties before they were elected in national elections. If Abacha wants to contest, he should have left the army in 1995 when the decree for the transition programme became operational.

A President-Elect exists in the custody of the ruling dictatorship

General Abacha cannot become a civilian president because a President-Elect exists in the person of Chief M.K.O Abiola. Chief Abiola won the June 12, 1993 Presidential Elections and democratic decision-making bodies existed at all tiers of government at that time.

If General Sani Abacha, by acts of commission or omission becomes a civilian president, Nigerians would have been made to believe that any legitimate leader of the Nigerian people could be ousted and put in the custody of usurpers of popular sovereignty. Such a situation is against the will of God and the interest of peace, stability and democracy.

The current so called Transition Programme is neither credible nor democratic.

Neither the actions of General Abacha's government nor that of its so-called Transition Agencies confer anything near credibility on the Transition Programme. NARECOM, (Alex Akinyele's outfit), the Transition Implementation Committee (TIC), National Electoral Commission (NECON) etc are not independent or free of manipulation. What use is a NECON that presides over meetings of government-funded political parties which "agree" after such a meeting to adopt a military dictator as a "consensus" presidential candidate? These agencies cannot even conduct credible elections!

There are very few countries in the world that can boast of more accomplished and patriotic professionals, businessmen, intellectuals, and retired members of the armed forces and civil service than Nigeria. Yet, the regime of General Abacha and its transition agencies contrive a transition programme in which no independent civilian politician is available for electoral context for the Presidency! If government and its agencies are deceiving themselves, Nigerians are not deceived.

Consequently, even if the fact of M.K.O. Abiola electoral victory were not there, the current Transition Programme would still have been a ludicrous enterprise.

1994 - 1998: Four years of economic crisis and unprecedented decline in the welfare of the Nigerian masses.

Even if the incumbent Abacha regime were an elected government, its economic policy is such a monumental disaster that its leaders ought to have resigned. As SAP policies continued to be imposed on the vast majority of Nigerians, government functionaries and their friends continue to amass unprecedented personal wealth, the indices of economic disaster and poverty are visible everywhere. The capacity utilisation of industries have deteriorated so badly that industries are closing down; the value of the naira is still held down, Nigeria's local industries remain unaided and unprotected, basic commodities remain outside the reach of most working people; millions of workers have lost their jobs and many more are threatened with retrenchment. Salaries are unpaid in some government institutions.

At the level of social services and public facilities, the crisis of SAP has deepened. Public transport, roads, water supply, education, electricity, public security etc. have completely broken down. Nigerians pay more for petrol but the pumps are dry most of the time while those who import petrol are raking in a huge windfall... in 1998 alone, a budgetary allocation of N48 billion is being earmarked for fuel importation.

All in all, the economic policies and their implementation are chaotic, unco-ordinated and replete with interministerial and other forms of internal wranglings. For the whole of 1997, capital allocations were hardly disbursed in some instances. The Nigerian public does not even know just how much is in the government's purse; Government does what it likes with public funds, for example; organising "solidarity" rallies and fighting foreign wars (Sierra Leone and Liberia).

The so called sanitisation in the banking industry is largely a ruse. Government actions on the financial institutions are selective and discriminatory as institutions and operatives who are influential are totally untouched by the so-called sanitisation.

In the pursuit of what many Nigerians have come to view as official armed robbery, the tradition of seizure of public property under the so-called programme of privatisation has become further entrenched. Public enterprises (NEPA, Universities, Refineries, Public Works Departments, Forestry Services, Toll Gates, Postal and Telecom systems, River Basin Authorities etc.) are deliberately neglected to create justification for auctioning them to the few rich in Nigeria.

Sycophancy, personality cult, corruption and decay of public morality

State media programmes are replete with Federal and state-sponsored praise-singing, solidarity visits and rallies building personality cults around General Abacha and other public officers, their wives and children. Youths, the so-called traditional rulers and other groups are paid, coaxed or lured into pro-government solidarity rallies.

The wives and children of public officers use public funds and political influence to impose themselves on public consciousness building multimillion naira public-funded bureaucracies (such as FSP, FEAP, NAOWA, PAOWA etc.)

Various individuals in the expanding multiplicity of mushrooming multi-billion naira bureaucracies and Task forces such as Federal Capital Authority, FEAP, PTF avail themselves of the vanity of congratulatory messages from contractors and other hangers-on on occasions of birthdays, chieftaincy-title awards, and awards of meaningless honorary degrees by our neglected universities.

Nothing attests to the ascendancy of corruption and the decay of public morality better than the arbitrariness, corruption of various wings of public service especially the Nigerian Police which virtually robs road users at gunpoint or otherwise extort money in various other ways. This corruption of various minor public operatives of course flow from the decay at the top and the dehumanising wages of such public functionaries - police, nurses, teachers etc.

The limits of sycophancy and decay of morality is further shown in other ways. Today, public officers in and out of uniform wear Abacha badge and they campaign openly for the Abacha self-succession. On a more corrupting level, Abacha's regime openly encourages opportunists to sing its praise and institute categories of souvenirs (Abacha television, Abacha rice etc.). These are typical dictatorial and imperial tactics of personality cult which are totally alien to democracy. Any individual who encourages this type of self-promotion is not fit to lead a democracy because the tactics engender corruption.

A scandalous foreign policy record

Since the time of Babangida, this military dictatorship has continued to damage Nigeria's image inside and outside Africa. This is not because military dictatorship is defending Nigeria's interest, but because it is brutalising its own people and engaging in wasteful adventures abroad (Gambia, Liberia and, now, Sierra Leone).

The situation is particularly grave today as Nigeria is despised abroad, isolated and with its leadership ostracised inspite of massive expenditure on image laundering. Nigeria's "leaders" are so isolated that they have to pitch

camp with evil forces represented by people like Mobutu. Caught in that isolation, the regime forces many of our people to seek political and economic refuge abroad where they have to serve others as slaves. On the level of economic diplomacy, the regime continues clumsily to serve the same foreign economic interests. It imposes untold economic hardship on our people by imposing SAP through the force of arms and in the interest of foreign economic and financial interests.

Terrorising opposition and creating disaffection among the masses

Perhaps the greatest measure of the political success and legitimacy of any regime is the degree of civil, economic and cultural rights which the people (particularly organised political opposition) enjoy and the degree of social harmony the masses of the governed have especially in a plural polity. The Abacha dictatorship is an unmitigated disaster on both accounts.

In Nigeria today, there is a general feeling that Nigeria is an occupied territory with a multiplicity of regular and undercover police, military and paramilitary "security" units. The burden of **being suspected of any** crime by the dictatorship weighs as heavily on the alleged suspect as his relatives, wife (wives) and children! Judicial murder is now a real component of the junta's ideology of governance. To be sentenced to a term of imprisonment is as fatal as being condemned to death. Today, an unprecedented number of political prisoners are in detention - many without any form of trial whatsoever, many "tried" by "courts" or tribunals that are everything but independent and impartial. Journalists, labour leaders, soldiers (retired and serving) political opponents are all languishing in various Nigerian prisons. Many of them are held completely incommunicado and under such terrible conditions that it is not surprising that Shehu Yar'Adua who once served in the highest decision-making echelon of the Nigerian Army died like a common criminal in prison.

On yet, another level, Nigerians in various contiguous communities in Delta, Taraba, Bauchi and Osun States are embroiled in violent communal and inter-communal clashes as a result of either government's political incompetence and/or deliberate programmes of diversion. Closely related to the foregoing is the fact that the economic and political crises created by military dictatorship have also created frustration and tribal, religious and other antipathies among the various groups in Nigeria. Nigerians are divided by various government policies so that the dictatorship can stay in power.

How can the head of a regime that thrives on terror against opposition and instigation of disaffection among our people become a civilian president?

What have Nigerians gained from Abacha and his regime?

* **Low wages**
* Increase in the price of petrol (from N3 to N11)
* **Retrenchment** of millions of workers
* Dead **educational** system, Empty hospitals
* Selling the people's property to military rulers and their friends (privatisation)
* Eating from the garbage can. Destruction of the Naira
* Galloping inflation (food, drugs, petrol, transport etc.)
* Shortage of petrol
* Lack of food for most Nigerians and Corruption
* Murder of political opponents; Ken Saro-Wiwa, Shehu Yar'Adua etc.
* Detention and jailing of fighters for human rights: Beko Ransome-Kuti, Shehu Sanni, Kunle Ajibade; etc. **Incarceration** of political opponents: M.K.O. Abiola, Olusegun Obasanjo, Sultan Ibrahim Dasuki, Olu Falae etc.
* Active promotion of **tribalism** in national policies
* Government **without the people**
* Election **rigging**, Government **by deceit and bribery**
* Neglect of the people's welfare
* Suppression of labour and trade unions
* Hostility to teachers and Students
* Denial of press freedom
* Social crimes - armed robbery and murder
* Fratricide (Ijaw, Itsekiri (Warri), Ife-Modakeke, Jukun-Tiv. etc)
* International disgrace (suspension from commonwealth, other international sanctions)
* Destruction of the judiciary
* Lawlessness (SSS, Police and other State Security Agencies)
* Sell-out of the economy to IMF, World Bank and other international allies(Chagoury and Chagoury)
* Creation of corrupt political groups (through UNCP, DPN, CNC, GDM, NCPN)
* Promotion of the indolent as contractors
* Looting and wastage of oil income
* Discouraging **national** organisations - NLC, NANS, ASUU, NBA etc.
* Dirty Tricks, Framing up individuals for crimes they did nor commit.
* Oppression of Ogoni people and other minorities
* Emasculation of normal infrastructure for governance (Ministries, Agencies etc.) through the creation of parallel, ephemeral political institutions e.g., FSP, FEAP, PTF etc.

The Way Forward

No amount of sponsored rallies will remove these facts.

Yet, we must not forget that Abacha has no power without the military. We must not just remove Abacha. We must end all military rule when we end Abacha's rule. We must organise **now.** Let us all show that the overwhelming majority of Nigerians want neither Abacha nor military rule nor any dictatorship.

Resist everywhere; at work, on the street; discuss how to end the dictatorship in your church or your mosque, your club; join the democratic forces now.

What should replace Abacha?

(a) A release of all political prisoners.

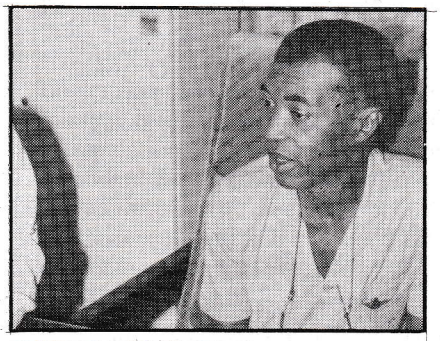
(b) Formation of government of national unity headed by M.K.O Abiola - whose mandate will be:
Creation of jobs; urgent reforms in the health care system to cater for everyone; restoration of NLC, ASUU, NBA and repeal of all anti-labour laws.

(c) An all Nigerian Sovereign Conference to find a lasting solution to the national crisis.

SAVE NIGERIA FROM ABACHA AND THE MILITARY

STOP THIS DICTATORSHIP NOW !

FREE THEM NOW !



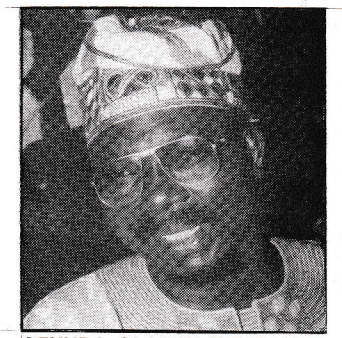
DR BEKO RANSOME-KUTI - Renown Human Rights activist and CD Chairman. Jailed for alleged coup plot since 1995.



CHIEF FRANK OVIE KOKORI - Trade Unionist/ Labour leader. Detained without trial since August 1994.



GEN. OLUSEGUN OBASANJO, first and the only Nigerian Military Head of State to hand over to Civilian Government in 1979. Jailed for alleged coup plot since 1995.



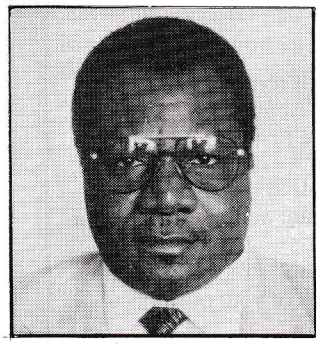
OTUNBA OLABIYI DUROJAIYE, politician (former presidential aspirant) and pro-democracy activist, detained without trial since December 1996



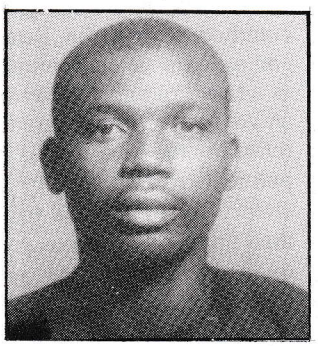
CHIEF M.K.O. ABIOLA, elected President on June 12, 1993. Detained without trial since June 1994.



MS CHRIS ANYANWU, Journalist/ Publisher, TS magazine. Jailed for alleged coup plot since 1995.



ONOME OSIFO-WHISKEY, Journalist and Editor of Tell magazine, detained without trial since November 1997.



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

These men and one hundred others in detention are prisoners of conscience !
Demand for their immediate release now !!
Say NO to Abacha Presidency; he MUST be STOPPED 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 !!

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