



Nigeria - Researched and compiled by the Refugee Documentation Centre of Ireland on 29 April 2010

The OPC as a vigilante/social group - recent activities

A 2009 article from the *Daily Champion* newspaper states:

"In the south west region, the Oodua Peoples' Congress (OPC) holds sway. They are employed by communities and local governments to provide security. Well-armed with little or no supervision, they proclaim jungle justice on suspects and perceived opponents alike.

The group campaigns to protect the interests of the Yoruba ethnic group and seeks autonomy for the Yoruba people. As a complex organization, it has taken on several different roles as it has adapted to the changing political and security environment in Nigeria.

Its activities have ranged from political agitation for Yoruba autonomy and promotion of Yoruba culture to violent confrontation with members of other ethnic groups, and, more recently, vigilance and crime-fighting.

In the sphere of vigilance and crime fighting, the OPC has been allegedly responsible for numerous human rights abuses and acts of violence, and its members have killed or injured a number of unarmed civilians. However, OPC members have been victims as well as perpetrators of such abuses.

There have also been cases in which OPC members have killed or injured people, in the course of their vigilance work and in attempts to allegedly extort money. Their activities have led them into direct confrontation with the police a number of times thereby leading to violent clashes between the two, with casualties on both sides. OPC members have attacked police stations on many occasions, and have killed and injured several policemen." (Daily Champion (Lagos) (12 December 2009) *Nigeria; States and Politics of Security*)

An *Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada* query response from 2007 states:

"An 8 March 2006 Reuters article indicates that members of the OPC are "mostly unemployed young men who act as a parallel police force, armed with machetes and guns, in return for protection money" and that the group has been associated with "lynching" and "illegal detention."

News sources from 2006 and 2007 report on OPC members fighting or chasing down armed robbers (Vanguard 24 Aug. 2007; *ibid.* 4 Dec. 2006; Daily Trust 4 Dec. 2006). In 2007, a church in Lagos reportedly recruited OPC members to work as security guards and fight armed robbers (Daily Champion 2 Aug. 2007). On 4 December 2006, the Lagos-based Vanguard

newspaper reported that five of a group of fifteen suspected armed robbers were killed in a shootout with OPC members in Alausa near the Lagos-Ibadan expressway. On the same date, the Daily Trust newspaper based in Abuja reported that members of the OPC had "ambushed" four suspected armed robbers in Orile-Agege [Lagos State], tied their hands behind their backs and "without any delay, burnt [them] alive before police could arrive [at] the scene" (4 Dec. 2006). Corroborating information concerning this incident could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response." (Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada (31 August 2007) *Nigeria: Activities of both factions of the O'odua People's Congress (OPC) since 2006; treatment of OPC members by the Nigerian authorities*, NGA102592.E)

An earlier query response from the *Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada* states:

"Despite being outlawed by the Nigerian Federal Government (BBC 15 Feb. 2005) in 1999 (Revolutionary and Dissident Movements of the World 2004, 361), the OPC continues to operate (ibid.; SAS May 2005, 330 – 331). Its activities involve political activism for the autonomy of the Yoruba people (HRW Feb. 2003, 1), as well as violent activities, such as clashes with other ethnic groups (ibid.; Denmark Jan. 2005, 15), vigilante activities and crime fighting (HRW Feb. 2003, 1; SAS May 2005, 330; Revolutionary and Dissident Movements of the World 2004, 361). The activities of the organization have allegedly resulted in "numerous human rights abuses" (HRW Feb. 2003, 1) and injury or death to "hundreds" of people (ibid., 10).

Although the number of OPC "affronts" has declined since 2001 (This Day 4 Nov. 2005), there were reports in 2005 of OPC activities resulting in casualties (Xinhua News Agency 16 Feb. 2005; Dow Jones International News 18 June 2005; This Day 3 Nov. 2005; ibid. 9 Nov. 2005). In February 2005, a clash between the two factions of the OPC in Lagos resulted in the death of five persons and the severe injury of five police officers (Xinhua News Agency 16 Feb. 2005). In June 2005, members of the OPC allegedly killed between ten and fifty students from a university in southwestern Nigeria, who were protesting against "alleged killings and torture by the group" (Dow Jones International News 18 June 2005). In October 2005, "bloody violence" broke out between members of the two OPC factions in Lagos (This Day 3 Nov. 2005). One month later suspected OPC members "went on [a] rampage" in Oshodi, Lagos, thought to have resulted in the deaths of three persons (ibid. 9 Nov. 2005).

According to research conducted in 2005, some community members feel "threatened" and "uncomfortable" with the presence of OPC members in their community: there is the perception that the group is interested in supporting the rights of only the Yoruba, and is "hostile towards other tribes" (COAV May 2005, 250)." (Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada (16 February 2006) *Nigeria: Oodua People's Congress (OPC); leadership, membership, activities, and treatment by authorities (January 2005 - February 2006)* NGA101048.E)

A 2003 report on the OPC from *Human Rights Watch* states:

"From around 1999, the OPC began to get involved in crime-fighting activities. It is not entirely clear what prompted this shift in direction, other than a desire

to boost the organization's popularity. Some observers have linked it to the surge in popularity experienced by self-appointed vigilante groups in other parts of the country, notably the Bakassi Boys, a vigilante group active in the southeast of Nigeria. Despite using extremely violent and brutal methods, the Bakassi Boys were hailed as heroes by many residents in the southeast and credited with dramatically reducing the rate of violent crime in their areas of operation. Their success may have partly inspired the OPC to take on a similar role in the southwest.²³ Indeed, among some sectors of the Yoruba communities, the OPC's vigilante role succeeded in enhancing its image. However, other ethnic groups have complained that the OPC vigilantes have been imposed on them; groups such as the Hausa, who have been at the receiving end of serious ethnic violence on the part of the OPC, have felt especially uneasy with entrusting their security to such an organization. Several Hausa in Lagos told Human Rights Watch that they felt threatened by the presence of OPC patrols and preferred to keep their distance from them. A Hausa man in Ogun State said: "We don't talk to them. We ignore them. We fear them as they have weapons. Some of our people don't like to hear the name OPC."²⁴ An Igbo man in Lagos said: "The OPC are around. They haven't killed people recently, but they patrol at night with vehicles. They still hold monthly meetings [...] We feel uncomfortable with OPC as they are only looking after Yoruba interests in a selfish way. They are hostile towards other tribes."²⁵ (Human Rights Watch (February 2003) *The O'dua People's Congress Fighting Violence with Violence*)

A fact file on the OPC from the *National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and the Responses to Terrorism* notes:

"Observers assert that Adams' radical faction has hijacked the OPC and used it as a vehicle for its violent anti-government, anti-police, and anti-military vigilante agenda. Fasehun, mostly due to his disinclination towards resorting to violent means, is losing influence in the Yoruba community. Still, like Adams, Fasehun has been detained and released without trial several times by Nigerian authorities. As of December 1, 2005, Fasehun and Adams were both in prison on charges of treason, illegal possession of firearms, and membership in an "unlawful society." They are in the process of appealing their cases.

The Nigerian government has tried many different methods to respond to OPC-related violence. Several legislators have attempted to pass laws that would use OPC's militant branch as a local southern police force. Due to fears that having a government-sanctioned all-Yoruba force could exacerbate ethnic tensions, these efforts failed. On the other hand, a presidential shoot-on-sight order is still active for all OPC members. Every brutal police crackdown on OPC serves to radicalize the organization, effectively displacing the moderate elements that once existed in what has become a militant group." (National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and the Responses to Terrorism (1 March 2008) *Terrorist Organization Profile: Odua Peoples' Congress*)

References

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This response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Refugee Documentation Centre within time constraints. This response is not and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim to refugee status or asylum. Please read in full all documents referred to.

Sources consulted

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European Country of Origin Information Network

Human Rights Watch

Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada

National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and the Responses to Terrorism

Online newspapers

Refugee Documentation Centre Library

Refugee Documentation Centre Query Database

Transnational and Non-State Armed Groups, Harvard University

UN Human Rights Council

UNHCR Refworld

United States Department of State