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Issue Paper NIGERIA CHRONOLOGY OF EVENTS FEBRUARY 1995-MARCH 1996 July 1996

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MAP

See original.

Source: Amnesty International. 11 November 1994. *Nigeria: Military Government Clampdown on Opposition*. (AI Index: 44/13/94). London: Amnesty International.

GLOSSARY

CD	Campaign for Democracy
CLO	Civil Liberties Organization
CRP	Constitutional Rights Project
MOSOP	Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People
NADECO	National Democratic Coalition
NALICON	National Liberation Council
NCP	National Conscience Party
SSS	State Security Service

INTRODUCTION

This chronology is an update of the paper *Nigeria: Chronology of Events, January 1992-February 1995*, published by the DIRB in June 1995. It chronicles political events that occurred between February 1995 and March 1996, including steps taken by General Sani Abacha's military government to silence political opposition and counter the activities of democratic movements and human rights groups. This paper also describes the international community's reaction to the Nigerian government's actions, and outlines some of the sanctions that have been or may be imposed against Nigeria. Furthermore, since the country's human rights problems are not solely political, the chronology also notes incidents of ethnic unrest and mass executions of prisoners convicted of theft or use of firearms. Finally, special attention is paid to the transition to democracy, which suffered a setback in 1995 when General Abacha postponed the transfer of power to an elected government until 1998. For more information on the historical and sociological background, and on the political events that led to the current situation in Nigeria, please consult the above-mentioned paper and the DIRB's 1993 paper entitled *Nigeria: Religion and Conflict*.

CHRONOLOGY

1995

8 February

General Sani Abacha, leader of Nigeria's military government, dissolves the federal executive council in order to allow his ministers to prepare for the planned democratic regime by playing an active role in the new political parties (Xinhua 9 Feb. 1995; *Africa Research Bulletin* 23 Mar. 1995, 11747-48). However, no program has yet been developed for the transition to democracy (ibid.).

9 February

Nigerian writer Mohammed Sule is detained without being charged, apparently because of a documentary called *Nigeria at the Crossroads* that he was intending to produce (WiPC 6 Oct. 1995).

19 February

The Constitutional Rights Project (CRP), a Nigerian human rights group, publishes its annual report, which states that 1994 was the worst year for human rights violations in Nigeria's history^[1] (Reuters 19 Feb. 1995). Among other things, CRP estimates that Nigerian security forces killed at least 120 people in 1994, and maintains that General Abacha's government arbitrarily arrested several opposition members (ibid.).

21 February

Nigerian authorities issue an appeal for moderation after Muslims in Lagos distribute a leaflet calling for a holy war against Christians (Africa N^o. 1 21 Feb. 1995). This incident is particularly disturbing since it occurs only days after one Christian was beheaded and another lynched by crowds of Muslims in northern Nigeria (*Le Monde* 15 Mar. 1995; Africa N^o. 1 21 Feb. 1995).

March

More than 150 soldiers are arrested by security forces and accused of having plotted against General Abacha's military regime (AFP 6 Mar. 1995; *L'état du monde* 1996 1996, 227; *Africa Research Bulletin* 26 Apr. 1995, 11794-95). Those arrested include Colonels Lawan Gwadabe and R.S. Bello-Fadile. According to some sources, they were tortured while in detention (*Country Reports* 1995 1996, 198; VOA 8 May 1995; *Africa Research Bulletin* 25 May 1995, 11831).

10 March

Bayo Onanuga, editor-in-chief of a press agency in Lagos, is arrested days after publishing two articles disclosing details of the alleged coup attempt and the arrests that followed (AFP 11 Mar. 1995; AI 26 Oct. 1995, 5). Five days later another journalist, Chris Anyanwu, is also arrested. Both are released on 23 March without being charged (ibid.).

A representative of the Nigerian government confirms the arrest of 39 officers and civilians in connection with the alleged coup attempt (AFP 13 March 1995; *West Africa* 20-26 Mar. 1995, 431).

13 March

Retired General Olusegun Obasanjo, who headed a military regime between 1976 and 1979, is arrested on suspicion of being involved in a plot to overthrow Abacha (Reuters 13 Mar. 1995; *Africa Research Bulletin* 26 Apr. 1995, 11794). Four days earlier, on 9 March, his former second-in-command, retired General Shehu Musa Yar'Adua, was arrested for the same reason (ibid.; Reuters 13 Mar. 1995). General Obasanjo voluntarily gave up power to a civilian government in 1979 (ibid.; *Jeune Afrique* 20 July 1995, 50). Both Obasanjo and Yar'Adua have supported the establishment of democracy in Nigeria for several years (*Africa Research Bulletin* 26 Apr. 1995, 11794; Reuters 13 Mar. 1995). According to Amnesty International, they were incriminated by statements made by Colonel Bello-Fadile, who later retracted them, maintaining they had been obtained under duress (AI 26 Oct. 1995, 13).

16 March

The International Federation of Association Football (FIFA) decides against holding the world junior championship in Nigeria, invoking the Nigerian government's record of human rights violations (*L'état du monde* 1996, 1996, 227; *Jeune Afrique* 15 June 1995, 35).

General Abacha forms a new federal executive council of 36 ministers, of whom seven are army officers (NTA Television Network 16 Mar. 1995; *Afrique contemporaine* July-Sept. 1995, 91).

18 March

According to information provided by Abdul Oroh, the secretary-general of the Civil Liberties Organization (CLO), the trial of 18 army officers charged with conspiracy begins today. The trial is

conducted in camera before a special military tribunal (Africa N^o. 1 24 Mar. 1995).

22 March

AFP reports that in a telephone interview, Nigerian human rights lawyer Gani Fawehinmi questions the very existence of a coup plot and insists on the need to hold public trials (AFP 22 Mar. 1995).

23 March

General Abacha orders General Obasanjo to be placed under restriction (Radio Nigeria Network 24 Mar. 1995; *Africa Research Bulletin* 27 June 1995, 11859). Several weeks later, on 30 May, security agents question Obasanjo about his role in the alleged coup plot (ibid.).

2 April

An Irish missionary, Eileen Connell, is murdered by unknown assailants at the mission where she worked in Delta state (southern Nigeria) (*The Irish Times* 4 Apr. 1995; AFP 22 Apr. 1995; AP 22 Apr. 1995). Three suspects are arrested, but the motives for the murder remain undetermined (ibid.). The attack creates nervousness among Christians and foreigners in Nigeria (ibid.).

3 April

The editor-in-chief of *Majesty Weekly*, Bala Dan Abu, is arrested in Lagos after publishing an article entitled "Abiola in Trouble" (AFP 4 Apr. 1995; *La Lettre de Reporters sans frontières* May 1995, 24).

5 April

Archbishop Desmond Tutu of South Africa visits Nigeria to solicit the release of Moshood Abiola^[2] (*Keesing's Record of World Events* May 1995, 40490; *Africa Research Bulletin* 25 May 1995, 11817).

16 April

The Observer (London) claims that 60 to 80 members of the armed forces accused of being involved in an attempted coup d'état were summarily executed (*Africa Research Bulletin* 25 May 1995, 11831; *West Africa* 24-30 Apr. 1995, 614; Xinhua 17 Apr. 1995). The government categorically denies this allegation (ibid.; *West Africa* 24-30 Apr. 1995). Africa N^o. 1 reports that a diplomat has confirmed this claim and revealed the date and place of the executions: "18th March at the Lower Usuma Dam, 35 kilometres on the outskirts [*sic*] of Abuja, Nigeria's political capital" (Africa N^o. 1 17 Apr. 1995).

20 April

Chief Abiola's physician, Ore Faloma, is arrested upon arrival in Abuja. He had come at the government's invitation to tend to his patient (Reuters 21 Apr. 1995). Dr. Faloma, who had often maintained that Chief Abiola was "seriously ill" (ibid.; AI 24 Apr. 1995), is released three days later (*Country Reports 1995 1996*, 200).

25 April

A constitutional conference organized by the government grants the military the freedom to set the target date for the transition to a democratic government (*Afrique contemporaine* July-Sept. 1995, 91; *New African* July-Aug. 1995; Reuters 26 Apr. 1995). The conference also adopts a draft constitution recommending that the president of Nigeria alternately come from northern and southern Nigeria (*Keesing's* May 1995, 40490).

1 May

The International Press Institute reports that the secret police have for some time been harassing writer Niyi Oniororo, publisher of the newspaper *People's News* (1 May 1995). He had recently published *A Rotten Country*, "a satirical novel about a corrupt and unscrupulous African dictator."

According to the same source, people selling and reading the book were also being harassed (ibid.).

11 May

It is reported that the government told Abiola that, if he accepted the annulment of the 12 June 1993 presidential election as "irrevocable," he would be released from prison although kept under house arrest and subject to other restrictions. Abiola rejects the offer (*Keesing's* June 1995, 40537).

Mid-May

The Yoruba cultural group Afenifere, led by Adekunle Ajasin, and the Northern Elements Progressives Union (NEPU), led by Balarabe Musa, set out to form an alliance uniting all progressive forces in Nigeria (*Africa Research Bulletin* 27 June 1995, 11849; Reuters 1 June 1995).

19 May

Olawale Oshun, Acting Secretary General of the National Democratic Coalition (NADECO), is arrested in Lagos, apparently because the government wants to prevent a demonstration scheduled for 7-9 June to mark the second anniversary of the 12 June 1993 presidential election (IPS 25 May 1995).

22 May

The trial of Ken Saro-Wiwa, writer, environmentalist and leader of the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP), resumes in Port Harcourt (*Africa Research Bulletin* 27 June 1995, 11860). The trial had been adjourned on 3 May owing to Saro-Wiwa's health (*Afrique contemporaine* July-Sept. 1995, 92). Saro-Wiwa has been in detention since May 1994, [translation] "accused of being involved in the murder of four rival Ogoni" on 21 May 1994 (*Le Devoir* 8-9 Apr. 1995, A9; HRWA July 1995, 14). A special tribunal established by the military government is dealing with the case of Saro-Wiwa and others charged in this matter (ibid.)^[3].

In Ilorin, SSS agents arrest Joe Okei, member of the Campaign for Democracy (CD), after the CD distributes "a tract calling on the population to struggle for the re-establishment of democracy in Nigeria" (AFP 23 May 1995). Two other CD officials, Sylvester Odione-Akhaine and Shehu Sanni, have already been in detention for some time (ibid.; HRW Dec. 1995, 58; *Country Reports* 1995 1996, 200). No reason is given for their detention (ibid.). Shehu Sanni is subsequently sentenced to 15 years of imprisonment for concealment of treason in the matter of the attempted coup (AI 26 Oct. 1995, 26). Odione-Akhaine, however, is released at the end of the year (IPS 5 Jan. 1996).

23 May

Femi Falana, a pro-democracy activist and one of Ken Saro-Wiwa's defence lawyers, is arrested at his office by State Security Service (SSS) agents, who thus prevent him from attending Saro-Wiwa's trial (AFP 23 May 1995).

31 May

At least five persons are killed and several others injured when two ethnic groups, the Hausa and the Ibo, clash in Kano (Reuters 31 May 1995; Xinhua 31 May 1995).

In a stadium in the town of Ilorin, a bomb explodes during the launching ceremony of a government family support program, killing at least three people and injuring numerous others (AP 1 June 1995; Xinhua 7 June 1995). No one claims responsibility for the explosion, but the government accuses anti-government forces of being behind the bombing (AP 1 June 1995). About 30 people are questioned in a police investigation (Xinhua 7 June 1995).

June

The team of defence lawyers for Ken Saro-Wiwa and his companions, led by Gani Fawehinmi, withdraws from the case to protest irregularities in the trial (HRW Dec. 1995, 59; *Country Reports 1995 1996*, 202).

1 June

Michael Ajasin, the director of NADECO, is arrested in Owo along with several other Yoruba politicians at a meeting of Afenifere (Reuters 1 June 1995). Ajasin is released the next day, and the others are all released on 3 June (ibid. 3 June 1995).

3 June

At a meeting of the Democratic Alternative group, SSS agents arrest five of the group's members, including its president, lawyer Alao Aka-Bashorun (HRW Dec. 1995, 58; Reuters 6 June 1995). Aka-Bashorun is a member of Abiola's defence team (ibid.). The five are released a few days later (HRW Dec. 1995, 58).

4 June

Journalist Christine Anyanwu is arrested again (AI 26 Oct. 1995, 7). She is alleged to have published an article [translation] "revealing the names of 19 people arrested" by the government, which suspected them of involvement in a coup attempt (*Libération* 9-10 Dec. 1995, 11).

5 June

The trial of 22 people charged with being involved in a plot begins in Lagos (AI 26 Oct. 1995, 5; AFP 5 June 1995). The press is invited to the first day of the trial (AI 26 Oct. 1995, 5; AFP 5 June 1995).

12 June

In response to a call from the Campaign for Democracy, "thousands of Nigerian workers" stay home on the second anniversary of the nullified democratic elections (Reuters 12 June 1995).

13 June

General Obasanjo is arrested again and placed in solitary confinement (AFP 14 June 1995; *Jeune Afrique* 20 July 1995, 50).

14 June

Following a decision by the Federal Court in Lagos, "the chairman of the Campaign for Democracy, Dr. Beko Ransome-Kuti, was freed on bail" (RFI 14 June 1995). Ransome-Kuti had been arrested a few days before the second anniversary of the 1993 presidential election (HRW Dec. 1995, 58).

17 June

The government representative in Kano meets with "Islamic and community leaders" to discuss a tract distributed by the Jammatu Tajdidi Islamiya (Islamic Renewal Group), a previously unknown fundamentalist organization. This tract calls on non-Muslims to leave Kano State or face a "calamity" (AFP 18 June 1995; *Jeune Afrique* 6 July 1995, 53).

18 June

Writer Wole Soyinka and other Nigerian intellectuals take the first step toward creating a government in exile by establishing the National Liberation Council (NALICON). However, several of its members are still in Nigeria and remain anonymous (*Keesing's* July 1995, 40585; *Africa Confidential* 23 June 1995, 2).

27 June

The Constitutional Conference tables its draft constitution. General Abacha announces [translation] "the

immediate lifting of the ban on the activities of political parties" (*Le Monde* 29 June 1995; IPS 28 June 1995). General Abacha adds, however, that "no political activities [will] be allowed until ... the National Electoral Commission (NEC) [is] reconstituted" (*Country Reports 1995 1996*, 204).

July

In a report entitled *Nigeria: The Ogoni Crisis: A Case Study of Military Repression in Southeastern Nigeria*^[4], Human Rights Watch Africa reports mistreatment of the Ogoni by the Nigerian army, which is alleged to have deliberately provoked bloody ethnic confrontations, and to have been guilty of numerous other forms of human rights violations (July 1995).

West Africa notes renewed political activity "in all parts of the country" and particularly that "political clubs and associations [are] growing in number" (24-30 July 1995, 1146).

3 July

Gani Fawehinmi, lawyer and founder of the National Conscience Party (NCP), is arrested in Lagos, one day after a press conference at which he criticized the terms for lifting the ban on political activities (Reuters 4 July 1995; *Africa Research Bulletin* 23 Aug. 1995, 11917). He is freed two weeks later (HRW Dec. 1995, 58; *Afrique contemporaine* Oct.-Dec. 1995, 120).

9 July

In Port Harcourt, "over 200 college students, suspected to be [members of] secret cults, [are] arrested" (Xinhua 9 July 1995). According to Nigerian police, the members of such sects are often involved in criminal activities (ibid.).

11 July

Visiting Nigeria to investigate the trials of alleged plotters, a team mandated by the Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative and chaired by Flora MacDonald, claims to have "found evidence of repression" (Reuters 11 July 1995; HRW Dec. 1995, 61).

14 July

According to the Nigerian Minister of Defence, out of the 51 people accused of being involved in a plot, 40 (including General Obasanjo) have been found guilty and sentenced (AP 14 July 1995; *Country Reports 1995 1996*, 199; *Keesing's* Sept. 1995, 40630). However, the sentences imposed on those convicted are not made public (ibid.).

16-18 July

Authorities in Port Harcourt arrest Lucky Akarueze, vice-chairman of the Campaign for Democracy, and Chis Akanni, an official of the CDHR (Reuters 20 July 1995). Two days later Democratic Alternative's secretary-general Chima Ubani is arrested in Lagos, while former CDHR vice-president Osagie Obayuwans is arrested in Benin (ibid.). According to Amnesty International, the Nigerian government accuses the organizations to which these people belong of [translation] "plotting to release by force those who are on trial for treason" (AI 26 Oct. 1995, 8).

22 July

Forty-three prisoners found guilty of armed robbery are publicly executed by firing squad at Kirikiri Prison in Lagos State (NTA Television Network 22 July 1995; AI Sept. 1995, 5).

26 July

At a press conference, security agents arrest General Obasanjo's lawyer, Olatunji Abayomi, who has just proclaimed his client's innocence (Reuters 26 July 1995; *Afrique contemporaine* Oct.-Dec. 1995,

121; *Africa Research Bulletin* 28 Sept. 1995, 11955; HRW Dec. 1995, 59). According to *Country Reports 1995*, Abayomi was still in detention at the end of 1995 (1996, 201).

27-28 July

The chairman of the Campaign for Democracy, Dr. Beko Ransome-Kuti, is detained again (AFP 28 July 1995; Reuters 29 July 1995). The government charges him with "disclosing information on a secret trial of 40 people" suspected of involvement in a coup attempt (*Africa Research Bulletin* 28 Sept. 1995, 11955). The next day, 28 July, CLO director Abdul Oroh is also arrested (AFP 28 July 1995; AI 26 Oct. 1995, 8). Oroh was still in detention at the end of 1995 (*Country Reports 1995* 1996, 201). It is later revealed that Ransome-Kuti is one of the 40 people convicted of involvement in a coup attempt (*Africa Research Bulletin* 26 Oct. 1995, 11981; Reuters 2 Oct. 1995; *ibid.* 11 Oct. 1995; AI 26 Oct. 1995, 26).

August

The government disregards the Lagos Federal High Court's order to justify the detentions of Beko Ransome-Kuti and Abdul Oroh (*Country Reports 1995* 1996, 202).

1 August

In response to the Sani Abacha government's human rights violations, South Africa embargoes arms exports to Nigeria (*Keesing's* Sept. 1995, 40668; *Africa Confidential* 25 Aug. 1995, 1).

13 August

Clement Tusima, one of the Ogoni detained since May 1994, dies in detention (Reuters 3 Sept. 1995; AI 26 Oct. 1995, 19). Amnesty International claims he died [translation] "apparently after being seriously ill for months without receiving the care his condition required" (*ibid.*).

20 August

On the initiative of President Nelson Mandela of South Africa, Robert Mugabwe of Zimbabwe and Yoweri Museveni of Uganda meet with General Abacha to discuss, among other things, the fates of Chief Abiola, General Obasanjo and the 39 others convicted of conspiracy (*Africa Confidential* 25 Aug. 1995, 1; *Africa Research Bulletin* 28 Sept. 1995, 11955-56).

23 August

The government creates "a 39-man committee to review the draft constitution submitted to it on 27 June by the constitutional conference" (AFP 25 Aug. 1995). Mr. Justice Adolphus Karibi-Whyte, who directed the work of the conference, calls this government intervention irregular (*ibid.*).

7 September

According to *Africa* N^o. 1, two officials of *The Week* are arrested in Lagos, apparently for publishing reports that General Abacha was in ill health (8 Sept. 1995; *Country Reports 1995* 1996, 204).

Eighteen criminals are publicly executed in Delta State (southern Nigeria) (AFP 12 Sept. 1995; *Africa Research Bulletin* 26 Oct. 1995, 11981).

9 September

In Zaria, five students at Ahmadu Bello University are stabbed to death in ethnic confrontations that also leave several people injured (AP 9 Sept. 1995). The trouble apparently started when faculty members called on the university's vice-president to resign because he was not a Hausa-Fulani (*ibid.*).

18 September

Ken Saro-Wiwa begins a hunger strike "to protest about his continued detention and the treatment of the Ogoni people by the regime" (*Africa Research Bulletin* 26 Oct. 1995, 11981; AFP 18 Sept. 1995).

25 September

Gani Fawehinmi and five other NCP members are released on bail (AFP 25 Sept. 1995; *Country Reports 1995 1996*, 200). They were arrested three days earlier on charges that included "unlawful assembly" (ibid.).

1 October

On the 35th anniversary of Nigerian independence, General Abacha delivers a speech announcing his program for a transition to a civilian government. The plan will allow the military to remain in power until October 1998 (*West Africa* 9-15 Oct. 1995a, 1556-57; *The Ottawa Citizen* 2 Oct. 1995, A6). Under the plan, the country would be divided into six regions that would share power on a rotating basis (*West Africa* 9-15 Oct. 1995a, 1556-57; *The Christian Science Monitor* 6 Oct. 1995, 18; AFP 2 Oct. 1995). At the same time, General Abacha announces that General Obasanjo and the other conspirators will have their sentences commuted (*West Africa* 9-15 Oct. 1995a, 1556-57; *The Ottawa Citizen* 2 Oct. 1995, A6; Reuters 11 Oct. 1995). He also lifts the ban on *The Punch* and the *National Concord*, dailies that support the imprisoned Chief Abiola (*West Africa* 9-15 Oct. 1995a, 1556-57; *Africa Research Bulletin* 26 Oct. 1995, 11981).

The government broadcasts a program on Nigerian television that shows a few segments from the trials (Reuters 2 Oct. 1995; *West Africa* 9-15 Oct. 1995b, 1557). According to the program, there were "two plots, which eventually converged" (Reuters 2 Oct. 1995). However, Amnesty International contends that [translation] "the evidence was far from convincing and raised more questions than it solved" (26 Oct. 1995, 12).

2 October

Thousands of people in General Abacha's home state of Kano demonstrate in favour of the federal government's transitional program (AFP 2 Oct. 1995). According to some observers, it all "looked stage-managed" (ibid.).

6 October

Chief Alfred Oritsewehimi Rewane, a businessman and opposition politician, was murdered at his home in Ikeja, in the northern part of the state of Lagos (AFP 7 Oct. 1995). Seven individuals are arrested in connection with this murder, which the police contend is burglary-related (AFP 3 Jan. 1996a). However, several observers do not rule out the hypothesis of a political assassination (AFP 7 Oct. 1995).

9 October

In an interview with the independent weekly *The News*, author Wole Soyinka denounces General Abacha's decision to remain in power until 1998, and calls for an armed struggle to overthrow him (AFP 9 Oct. 1995).

10 October

The government confirms that 44 people have been convicted by a military tribunal and announces their sentences, adding that those sentenced to death will have their sentences commuted either to life imprisonment or 25 years, and that life sentences will be commuted to 15 years in prison (AI 26 Oct. 1995, 7; *Country Reports 1995 1996*, 202). The former group includes Colonel Gwadabe, Colonel Bello-Fadile and General Yar'Adua, while the latter group includes General Obasanjo, Doctor Beko Ransome-Kuti and Mallam Shehu Sanni, as well as journalists Chris Anyanwu, Kunle Ajibade, George Mbah and Ben Charles Obi (AI 26 Oct. 1995, 23-28; HRW Dec. 1995, 58-59).

20 October

The government announces the creation of a human rights commission in Nigeria (IPS 27 Oct. 1995).

This gesture does not impress CD treasurer Okechukwu Ndiribe, who feels the government must begin by "releasing political detainees" if it wants to demonstrate its respect for human rights (ibid.).

21 October

The Guardian reports that a clandestine letter signed by Beko Ransome-Kuti and Shehu Sanni, both in prison, claims that some of the accused are being tortured (21 Oct. 1995).

31 October

MOSOP president Ken Saro-Wiwa and eight other people are "convicted of murder and sentenced to death by hanging" (AI 31 Oct. 1995; WiPC 31 Oct. 1995; *New African* Dec. 1995, 19). Amnesty International believes "at least two of them—Ken Saro-Wiwa and Doctor Barinem Kiobel—to be prisoners of conscience" (AI 31 Oct. 1995).

10 November

Saro-Wiwa and his eight companions are hanged in Port Harcourt (IPS 10 Nov. 1995; AI 12 Dec. 1995; *Country Reports 1995* 1996, 197).

11 November

In Lagos, a crowd assembled to protest against the execution of Ogoni militants is dispersed by police [translation] "shooting over the heads of the demonstrators." Five people are arrested, including four members of the National Conscience Party (NCP) (AFP 11 Nov. 1995).

At the Commonwealth summit, Nelson Mandela "recommend[s] the expulsion of Nigeria from the Commonwealth" (IPS 11 Nov. 1995). The next day (12 November) Nigeria is suspended, but not expelled, from the Commonwealth (*Le Monde* 13 Nov. 1995; *Jeune Afrique* 30 Nov. 1995, 52-53). A number of Commonwealth countries, including Canada, recall their high commissioners from Abuja (*Le Monde* 13 Nov. 1995).

17 November

The Russian news agency ITAR-TASS reports that seven students, members of the Nigerian Human Rights Committee, have been arrested by police in Lagos (17 Nov. 1995).

Violent confrontations occur in Port Harcourt between federal government and MOSOP supporters (Africa N^o. 1 17 Nov. 1995).

20 November

At a meeting in Brussels, the European foreign ministers adopt sanctions against Nigeria that consist of [translation] "an arms embargo and a refusal to issue visas to members of the military junta and their families" (*Libération* 21 Nov. 1995, 10).

24 November

A Shell representative states that three of the company's five posts in Ogoniland have been sabotaged, but cannot specify the dates on which the incidents occurred (UPI 24 Nov. 1995).

25 November

There are reports that another 19 Ogoni activists have been accused in the May 1994 murders of four Ogoni chiefs, and will be prosecuted by the government (*Le Monde* 28 Nov. 1995; *Africa Research Bulletin* 25 Jan. 1996, 12083; AI 12 Dec. 1995).

29 November

During an inauguration at Ife University in the state of Osun (southwest Nigeria), the Minister of

Communications leaves the premises when confronted by teachers demonstrating against the execution of the Ogoni leaders (AFP 30 Nov. 1995).

December

In the space of a few days, the government issues decrees creating three transitional organs: the Transition Implementation Committee (TIC), the National Electoral Commission of Nigeria (NECON), and the State Creation, Local Government and Boundary Adjustment Committee (*West Africa* 11-17 Dec. 1995, 1906; *ibid.* 19-25 Feb. 1996, 263; *Afrique contemporaine* Jan.-Mar. 1996, 84).

5 December

Thousands of students demonstrate in Ile-Ife against the execution of Saro-Wiwa and his eight companions (Reuters 5 Dec. 1995).

14 December

At a meeting held in Lagos under the auspices of NADECO, hundreds of Nigerian politicians belonging to various religions and ethnic groups set up a committee to negotiate the terms for the end of the military regime with the government (*Africa Research Bulletin* 25 Jan. 1996, 12083; *West Africa* 25-31 Dec. 1995, 1986; BBC World Service 4 Jan. 1996).

Mid-December

In the state of Sokoto (northwest Nigeria), 20 people are killed, 120 are injured and 40 are arrested in confrontations between the Hausa and Fulani ethnic groups (ITAR-TASS 19 Dec. 1995; AFP 18 Dec. 1995).

17 December

SSS agents confiscate the entire 18 December press run of *Tell*, apparently because it discusses the possibility of releasing Abiola (Reuters 18 Dec. 1995; *Country Reports 1995 1996*, 204).

18 December

Lagos State police prohibit all assemblies of a political nature and "remind members of the public that the Public Order Decree 5 of 1979 is still in force" (Radio Nigeria Network 19 Dec. 1995; IPS 19 Dec. 1995).

19 December

Using combat tanks, the Nigerian riot police prevent a pro-democracy demonstration from taking place in Lagos (IPS 19 Dec. 1995; *Africa Research Bulletin* 25 Jan. 1996, 12083). The authorities contend that the demonstration is illegal because NADECO, the group that organized it, is not an officially recognized association (IPS 19 Dec. 1995).

23 December

The press run of *Tell* is confiscated by SSS agents, who then arrest Nosa Igiebor, the magazine's editor-in-chief (Reuters 24 Dec. 1995; *Country Reports 1995 1996*, 204; AI 10 Jan. 1996). The issue in question claims that Abacha "terrorises the opposition" (Reuters 24 Dec. 1995).

28 December

In Abeokuta, the police ban a CD demonstration against the detention of General Obasanjo, Chief Abiola and CD president Beko Ransome-Kuti, and then arrest several CD members, including acting president Frederic Fasheun (AFP 28 Dec. 1995). They are charged with "circulating seditious material" and released on bail on 29 December (*ibid.* 29 Dec. 1995).

General Abacha creates the National Reconciliation Committee, whose mandate is to promote unity,

peace and a harmonious transition to democracy (Radio Nigeria Network 28 Dec. 1995; AFP 28 Dec. 1995).

1996

January

It is reported that at least two of Chief Abiola's aides have been released since November (*West Africa* 8-14 Jan. 1996; AFP 31 Dec. 1995).

1 January

An attempt is made on the life of Sylvestre Odion-Akhaine, general-secretary of the CD and one of the political prisoners released on 31 December (IPS 5 Jan. 1996; AFP 3 Jan. 1996b).

2 January

A federal government representative announces the release of four union leaders held since 1994 (Radio Nigeria Network 2 Jan. 1996).

3 January

MOSOP vice-president Ledum Metee^[5] is arrested in Port Harcourt, one day before a MOSOP-organized demonstration is to take place (AFP 5 Jan. 1996; *Keesing's* Feb. 1996, 40888).

The next day (4 January), the police use tear gas to disperse an Ogoni crowd assembled to commemorate "a day of solidarity with other minority peoples of the world" (Reuters 5 Jan. 1996). According to *The Guardian*, the police, uncharacteristically, "were exceedingly polite and gentle in the execution of their duties" (ibid.). A journalist with the London newspaper *Financial Times*, Paul Adams, was arrested at the meeting by SSS agents and "subsequently charged with possession of seditious material" (*Keesing's* Feb. 1996, 40888; *The Washington Post* 9 Jan. 1996). He is released on bail one week later (ibid.; AFP 23 Jan. 1996).

15 January

On the 30th anniversary of the first military coup in Nigeria, in Lagos, the authorities disperse a mass meeting organized by the CD "in remembrance of the dead pro-democracy activists" (AFP 15 Jan. 1996; Reuters 15 Jan. 1996).

17-19 January

According to information obtained from diplomatic sources on 17 January, the Nigerian government has made a Commonwealth delegation's visit contingent on Nigeria's suspension being revoked. The Nigerian press corroborates this information one week later (*Keesing's* Feb. 1996, 40888; AP 24 Jan. 1996).

Ibrahim Abacha, son of the head of state, dies on 17 January at the age of 28 in an airplane accident, along with 13 others (Reuters 19 Jan. 1996; *Africa Confidential* 2 Feb. 1996, 1-2). Responsibility for the attack is claimed by a previously unknown group, the United Front for Nigerian Liberation (UFNL), which vows to rid Nigeria of its leader by any means (ibid.; Reuters 19 Jan. 1996). The Campaign for Democracy, CRP and NCP quickly dissociate themselves from this group (ibid.). However, some sources believe no attack was involved and that the accident was caused by technical problems (*Africa Confidential* 2 Feb. 1996, 1-2; *The Economist* 27 Jan. 1996, 39-40)

On 18 January, a man is killed in a Kaduna hotel when a bomb that he has placed goes off (Reuters 19 Jan. 1996; NTA Television Network 20 Jan. 1996).

The next day, 19 January, another explosion occurs at Kano Airport, but no one is injured (ibid.; Reuters 19 Jan. 1996). According to the Lagos weekly *The News*, the Nigerian government suspects that writer Wole Soyinka is behind the attacks. Soyinka denies the allegation (*Courrier International* 29 Feb.-6 Mar. 1996, 27; *Africa Research Bulletin* 28 Mar. 1996, 12168).

30 January

Lawyer Gani Fawehinmi is detained by SSS agents before he can give a speech at the University of Lagos (AI 31 Jan. 1996; *Africa Research Bulletin* 28 Mar. 1996, 12168-69). According to AFP, "today, the High Federal Court in Lagos is expected to resume hearing of a suit filed by Mr. Fawehinmi against the Nigerian head of state, General Sani Abacha, for executing an opposition leader, Mr. Ken Saro-Wiwa" (30 Jan. 1996; *Africa Research Bulletin* 28 Mar. 1996, 12168-69; AI 31 Jan. 1996). More than a month later, on 6 March, the government states that Fawehinmi was detained under Decree N^o. 2, which "allows the government to detain anyone suspected of posing a threat to national security for an initial and renewable period of three months without a trial" (AFP 7 Mar. 1996).

31 January

NADECO and South African President Mandela both deny NTA Television Network (Lagos) allegations that the presidents of Burkina Faso and South Africa made contributions to NADECO to help it overthrow the Sani Abacha government by force (Africa N^o. 1 31 Jan. 1996; *West Africa* 12-18 Feb. 1996, 210; Reuters 1 Feb. 1996).

February

The government discloses plans for local elections (*West Africa* 19-25 Feb. 1996, 263; ibid. 11-17 Mar. 1996, 386-88).

2 February

The publisher of the independent daily *The Guardian*, Alex Ibru, is seriously injured after being attacked by armed individuals (Reuters 3 Feb. 1996). Police arrest nine persons in connection with this matter and call it a case of attempted robbery, but the Committee for the Protection of Journalists (CPJ) notes that nothing was stolen (ibid.). A few days later responsibility for the attack is claimed by a previously unknown group, the Revolutionary Movement for Hausa-Fulani Interest (REMIFI) (ibid. 8 Feb. 1996).

3 February

Several people are injured when a bomb explodes in a Zaria police station (PANA 5 Feb. 1996; *Africa Research Bulletin* 28 Mar. 1996, 12168).

9 February

Beko Ransome-Kuti's brother, Fela Anikulapo-Kuti, a well-known musician and critic of the military regime, is arrested "on suspicion [*sic*] of involvement with drugs" (Reuters 9 Feb. 1996). He is released on 13 February (IPS 14 Feb. 1996; Reuters 14 Feb. 1996). However, the next day, 14 February, the SSS arrests his lawyer, Femi Falana, who had launched a suit for damages against the police and the National Drug Law Enforcement Agency on his client's behalf (ibid.).

24 February

NADECO, the chief opposition group, calls on the government to hold a referendum to allow the people to choose between a new one-year plan for the transition to democracy developed by NADECO, and the three-year plan proposed earlier by the military (Africa N^o. 1 23 Feb. 1996; *West Africa* 11-17 Mar. 1996, 386-88). The Nigerian government sees NADECO's proposal as an attempt to derail the existing democratic process (*West Africa* 11-17 Mar. 1996, 386-88).

28 February

A devastating epidemic of contagious diseases (meningitis, measles and cholera) is reported in northern Nigeria, especially Kano State (BBC World Service 28 Feb. 1996).

March

Students from the University of Calabar in southeastern Nigeria sack a village to avenge the ritual murder of a female student by villagers seeking to appease the spirit of their dead chief (Reuters 7 Mar. 1996; BBC World Service 7 Mar. 1996). The police intervene, and five students are killed. The government opens a judicial inquiry into the matter. The university is closed pending the outcome (ibid.).

5 March

In Enugu state, 13 people are killed and more than 10,000 displaced in a territorial dispute between the Egbo Ide and the Iziogo communities (Radio Nigeria Network 5 Mar. 1996; *West Africa* 18-24 Mar. 1996, 410).

6 March

The National Reconciliation Committee announces that it will take steps to improve relations between the federal government and the Ogoni people. Among other things, this will involve a fairer division of the profits generated by natural resources and better protection of the environment (Radio Nigeria Network 6 Mar. 1996).

7-8 March

The Campaign for Democracy and exiled members of NADECO call on Nigerians to boycott local elections planned for the week of 16-25 March (AFP 8 Mar. 1995; *Africa N^o*. 1 8 Mar. 1996).

14 March

In a raid on the Campaign for Democracy's offices, SSS agents seize several documents and beat and arrest Muyiwa Idowu, one of the organization's officials (AFP 15 Mar. 1996). This incident occurred "hours after a fledgling human rights group called the Joint Action Committee, affiliated with the Campaign for Democracy, called for a boycott of municipal elections" planned for 16 March (ibid.; Reuters 14 Mar. 1996).

16 March

The first day of local elections with independent candidates. Notwithstanding the opposition's call for a boycott, turnout is high. Despite a few incidents, at least four people killed and about 70 arrested, the elections receive largely favourable media coverage (IPS 18 Mar. 1996; *West Africa* 25-31 Mar. 1996). According to Radio Nigeria, American observers are satisfied with the conduct of these elections, the first step in the military's plan for the transition to democracy (18 Mar. 1996).

NOTES

[1] This Constitutional Rights Project document, entitled *Annual Report on Human Rights Violations in Nigeria*, is available at the DIRB Resource Centre in Ottawa. [\[back\]](#)

[2] Chief Abiola is the presumed winner of the 1993 presidential elections, which were annulled by General Abacha's predecessor, General Ibrahim Babangida. Abiola declared himself president in April 1994 and was arrested and charged with treason. He has been detained since 23 June 1994. For more information on this incident, please consult the *paper Nigeria: Chronology of Events, January 1992-February 1995*, published by the DIRB in June 1995. [\[back\]](#)

[3] For more information about the arrest of Saro-Wiwa and his companions, please consult the paper *Nigeria: Chronology of Events, January 1992-February 1995*, published by DIRB in June 1995. [\[back\]](#)

[4] This document is available at the IRB's regional documentation centres. [\[back\]](#)

[5] The only Ogoni leader acquitted by the court that sentenced Saro-Wiwa and eight others to death in October 1995 (*Africa Research Bulletin* Mar. 1996, 12169). [\[back\]](#)

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