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Nigeria: Information on the O'odua People's Congress (OPC), including the methods of recruitment and the selection of members; implications of being a member and the consequences of refusing to join (2003-May 2005)

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The O'odua People's Congress (OPC) is a "vigilante" organization that was created to protect the interests of the Yoruba ethnic group in the Southwest of Nigeria and promote its autonomy (HRW Feb. 2003, 4; AI 19 Nov. 2002, Sec. 3.4.2; AFP 22 Aug. 2001; *ibid.* 13 Jan. 2002; see also AFP 6 Aug. 2002; *ibid.* 5 Aug. 2002; *ibid.* 21 June 2002).

A report published in January 2005, following a joint British-Danish fact-finding mission to Nigeria, described the OPC as "a strong group [that] does not recognise the government or the authority of the police" (Denmark Jan. 2005, 3.4.5). Sources reported that the government banned the OPC in 2000 after it was involved in riots and ethnic clashes in 1999 and 2000 (AFP 13 Jan. 2002; *ibid.* 23 Aug. 2001; *ibid.* 22 Aug. 2001; see also AI 19 Nov. 2002, 3.4.2; AFP 21 June 2002; *This Day* 1 Apr. 2003).

Claiming to have 5 million members, the OPC brings together a wide range of individuals, from intellectuals to less-educated and unemployed youth (HRW Feb. 2003, 6-7; see also AFP 22 Aug. 2001). The majority of members can be found in the southwestern states; however, others are spread throughout Nigeria and in other West African countries (HRW Feb. 2003, 6). According to Human Rights Watch (HRW), "there is a distinction between those who are registered, card-carrying members of the OPC - thought by some OPC officials to number no more than one million - and a possibly much larger number of sympathizers, who join OPC activities at various times" (Feb. 2003, 7).

Information on the methods of recruitment and the selection of members of the OPC was scarce among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate. However HRW stated that "[i]t would appear that people have joined the OPC for a variety of reasons, some because they specifically identify with their political ideology and the Yoruba self-determination agenda, others because they may feel they need a form of protection against what they perceive as political, economic or social discrimination and may have been impressed by the image of the organization. Others, mainly the mass [of] young, unemployed men, have simply taken advantage of the organization as a channel for venting their general frustration" (Feb. 2003, 7). HRW also identified the fact that members of the OPC were perceived as having "special powers" as a factor contributing to the recruitment of members (HRW Feb. 2003).

Information on the implications of being a member and the consequences of refusing to join could not be found among the sources consulted.

This Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim for refugee protection. Please find below the list of additional sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

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Kingdom Home Office, Immigration and Nationality Directorate (IND); United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNHCHR).

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