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### NGA102512.E

Nigeria: Consequences of refusing a chieftaincy title; protection available to individuals who refuse this title (2004 - 2007)

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The selection of chiefs, or traditional leaders, in Nigeria is based on the traditions within the country's various communities (HRW Apr. 2006, 8; see also ICG 3 Aug. 2006, 20; HRW Feb. 2005, 7). In 19 August 2004 correspondence, the Nigeria Country Director of the Heinrich Böll Foundation (HBF), "a non-governmental agency ... conducting projects in the field of civic education world-wide," wrote that

[o]verall, [the] role and functioning of traditional and chieftaincy institutions throughout Nigeria differs widely, depending to a good extent on the culture and traditions of the respective locality, region, and ethnic group.

For example, in the Niger Delta region [southern Nigeria], chiefs may be selected through inheritance or may be chosen for a set term or for life (ICG 3 Aug. 2006, 20; HRW Feb. 2005, 7).

However, one common feature is that chiefs are not elected (ibid. Apr. 2006, 8; see also HRW Feb. 2005, 7). They also do not have formal government positions, but are recognized by the government and reportedly hold "considerable political influence," particularly at the community level (ibid. Apr. 2006, 8; see also HRW Feb. 2005, 7).

Chiefs have traditionally received government contributions (ICG 3 Aug. 2006). Since the 1990s, chiefs in the oil-producing states of the Niger Delta have also received payments from the oil companies for use of the land (ibid.; ibid. 28 Sept. 2006, 4), and have reportedly become more "powerful" (HRW Feb. 2005, 7). The Web site of Akwa Ibom State's Ministry of Local Government and Chieftaincy Affairs states that, as a sign of respect, the government has "been able to cater for the Welfare of Traditional Rulers in the area of provision of functional cars and furnished palaces coupled with enhanced stipends" (n.d.). Competition for chieftaincy titles within the Niger Delta region has apparently "intensified," resulting in so-called "chieftaincy scuffles" (ICG 3 Aug. 2006, 21; see also ICG 28 Sept. 2006, 4; HRW Feb. 2005, 7).

Cited in Norway's August 2006 report on its fact-finding trip to Nigeria, Bukhar Bello of Nigeria's National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) indicated that it is "extremely rare" for someone to refuse a chieftaincy title and that traditional thrones are "subject [to] great competition in the local communities" (Norway Aug. 2006, 22). According to Bello, if the first person in line for a throne refuses it, someone else will want the position (ibid.).

In 19 August 2004 correspondence, the Nigeria Country Director of the Heinrich Böll Foundation (HBF) provided information on chieftaincy issues among the Igbo, an

ethnic group located in Nigeria's southeast. The Director said that, based on his research experience, there is no force involved in becoming a traditional leader (HBF 19 Aug. 2004). Like Bello, the Director indicated that in Nigeria, people compete for chieftaincy positions (ibid.). People can therefore "'refuse' [a chieftaincy] offer, and such refusal remains without consequences" (ibid.). However, the Director made the following statement concerning the roles of traditional rulers and traditional religion:

There is the widespread concept that a traditional deity or shrine can "call" on an individual to become her priest. ... Government-recognized Traditional Rulers and representatives of African traditional religion (e.g. priests "called" by the deity) are NOT necessarily identical .... However, there is a considerable variety of local practice. Thus, I could imagine that in certain communities and certain settings, the linkage between chieftaincy and traditional religion is rather strong. And in such a setting it is imaginable that a person "called" to become a priest of a deity may, at the same time, be called to become a Traditional Ruler. (This appears possible, even though I could not point to any particular example.) In this sense, the "refusal" of a chieftaincy position may be dangerous in such a setting. (HBF 19 Aug. 2004)

Further information on the consequences for refusing a chieftaincy title in Nigeria could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

Information on protection available to persons who refuse a chieftaincy title could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

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.

## References

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Norway. August 2006. Landinfo - Country of Origin Information Centre. *Fact-Finding Trip to Nigeria (Abuja, Lagos and Benin City) 12-26 March 2006*. <[http://landinfo.no/asset/491/1/491\\_1.pdf](http://landinfo.no/asset/491/1/491_1.pdf)> [Accessed 19 July 2007]

### **Additional Sources Consulted**

**Oral sources:** The Human Rights and Justice Group International (HRAJGI) and a professor of the Centre for Diaspora and Transnational Studies at the University of Toronto did not provide information within the time constraints of this Response. The Director of the Heinrich Böll Foundation Nigeria Office did not provide additional information within the time constraints of this Response.

**Internet sites, including:** AllAfrica, Amnesty International (AI), British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), European Country of Origin Information Network (ecoi.net), Human Rights Watch (HRW), United Kingdom Home Office, United Nations - Integrated Regional Information Networks (IRIN), United States Department of State.

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