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Nigeria: Activities of both factions of the O'odua People's Congress (OPC) since 2006;
treatment of OPC members by the Nigerian authorities
Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Ottawa

Background

Although banned by the Nigerian government in 1999 (*Revolutionary and Dissident Movements of the World* 2004, 361), the O'odua People's Congress (OPC) continues to operate in southwestern Nigeria (*ibid.*; Xinhua 8 Mar. 2006). The OPC, a nationalist Yoruba advocacy organization, was banned following its alleged involvement in "bloody clashes" in Lagos and surrounding states that reportedly led to "hundreds" of deaths (AFP 19 Dec. 2006; BBC 20 Dec. 2006). In 1999, the OPC split into two factions (GlobalSecurity.org 27 Apr. 2005; MIPT n.d.). The "parent" organization is led by the OPC's founder, Dr. Frederick Fasehun, and a more "militant" faction is led by Gani Adams (also referred to as Ganiyu Adams) (*ibid.*).

Activities of the OPC since 2006

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.

Cited in a 24 December 2006 article in the Lagos-based *This Day*, Gani Adams indicated that following the OPC's withdrawal of "security services" from Lagos State as a result of a "misunderstanding" between the group and the police, criminals "invaded" the state. Gani Adams claimed that close to 300 OPC members had been killed in confrontations with the Nigerian "police, other security agencies and armed robbers" (*This Day* 24 Dec. 2006). However, the OPC leader noted that, since his release from prison and return home [i.e., in December 2006 (US 6 Mar. 2007, Sec.

1.d; BBC 20 Dec. 2006)], the security situation in Lagos has improved (*This Day* 24 Dec. 2006).

According to a March 2007 *Vanguard* article, Frederick Fasehun indicated that during the 2007 elections, the OPC would cooperate with the Nigerian police and other law enforcement agencies to apprehend persons intending to cause "chaos" at polling stations in southwestern Nigeria (21 Mar. 2007).

Treatment of OPC members by the authorities

In 2005, Fasehun and Gani Adams were arrested and charged with belonging to an illegal organization among other offences (BBC 20 Dec. 2006; AFP 19 Dec. 2006), including illegal possession of firearms (*ibid.*; Xinhua 8 Mar. 2006). Four other OPC members were also arrested on similar charges (*ibid.*; *This Day* 7 Mar. 2006).

In March 2006, in an affidavit filed before the Federal High Court in Abuja concerning the trial of the six OPC members, the Nigerian government described the OPC as "murderous, tribal and secessionist" and alleged that the group had killed and "maimed" more than 10,000 persons over the previous seven years (*This Day* 7 Mar. 2006; Reuters 8 Mar. 2006; Xinhua 8 Mar. 2006). Fasehun denied the allegations (*Vanguard* 16 Mar. 2006). The affidavit was filed following a motion by the OPC members to have their trial transferred to southwestern Nigeria, where the organization's alleged offences occurred (*ibid.*; see also *This Day* 7 Mar. 2006); however, the Nigerian government claimed that if the trial were to be moved, persons involved in the trial, including the judge and witnesses, could be killed by OPC members (*This Day* 7 Mar. 2006; Reuters 8 Mar. 2006; *Vanguard* 16 Mar. 2006).

In April 2006, Fasehun was released from prison on bail because of health concerns (US 6 Mar. 2007, Sec. 1.d; see also AFP 19 Dec. 2006). In December 2006, charges against Fasehun, Gani Adams and the four other OPC members were dropped (*Vanguard* 20 Dec. 2006; *Daily Champion* 21 Dec. 2006; US 6 Mar. 2007, Sec. 1.d). The OPC members who had remained in prison were released (*ibid.*). The Federal High Court in Abjua dropped the charges against the men, stating it lacked the jurisdiction to try them because membership in the OPC is not a federal offence (BBC 20 Dec. 2006; *Vanguard* 20 Dec. 2006; *Daily Champion* 21 Dec. 2006).

According to *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2006*, unlike 2005, there were no politically-motivated arrests of OPC members during 2006 (US 6 Mar. 2007, Sec. 1.d).

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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