



## RESPONSES TO INFORMATION REQUESTS (RIRs)

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29 October 2008

### NGA102953.E

Nigeria: The status of Nigerians living in the Bakassi Peninsula; whether they are considered to be Nigerian citizens or citizens of Cameroon; whether individuals of Nigerian descent are free to move back to Nigeria (2006 - September 2008)  
Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Ottawa

The Bakassi Peninsula is an oil-rich territory in the Gulf of Guinea, over which Nigeria and Cameroon have had a long-standing dispute (BBC 14 Aug. 2008; UN 7 Aug. 2006). In 2002, the International Court of Justice (ICJ) ruled that the territory belonged to Cameroon (ibid.; *EIU* 15 Aug. 2008). Although Nigeria initially refused to comply with the ruling, in 2006 it agreed to hand over the territory to Cameroon (ibid.; BBC 14 Aug. 2008). The hand-over began in 2006 and was completed in August 2008 (ibid.; *EIU* 15 Aug. 2008).

Nigerians account for approximately 90 percent of the Bakassi Peninsula's population, which is thought to be close to 300,000 (BBC 14 Aug. 2008; *EIU* 15 Aug. 2008). However, it is estimated that over 100,000 Nigerians have left the Peninsula for Nigeria in the last few years (BBC 14 Aug. 2008; UN 11 Sept. 2008). The government of Nigeria has reportedly offered to relocate those Nigerians who do not wish to stay in the Peninsula under Cameroonian authority (BBC 11 Aug. 2006; UN 7 Aug. 2006), although several sources consulted by the Research Directorate suggest that resettlement measures have not been adequate (ibid. 11 Sept. 2008; ibid. 20 Nov. 2007; ibid. 13 Nov. 2007; BBC 1 Aug. 2008). Cited in an 11 September 2008 United Nations (UN) Integrated Regional Information Networks (IRIN) article, a local journalist indicated that the authorities in Akwa Ibom State [southern Nigeria] were "struggling to feed, shelter, clothe and medicate" the close to 100,000 Bakassi returnees. Cited in the same article, the Information Commissioner of Akwa Ibom indicated that the federal government had yet to provide assistance and that non-governmental organizations (NGOs) such as the Nigerian Red Cross were being relied upon (UN 11 Sept. 2008).

Concerning the Nigerians who have decided to remain in the Bakassi Peninsula, they may keep their Nigerian citizenship or may obtain Cameroonian citizenship (UN 13 Nov. 2007; BBC 11 Aug. 2006). The 2006 UN-backed *Agreement Between the Republic of Cameroon and the Federal Republic of Nigeria Concerning the Modalities of Withdrawal and Transfer of Authority in the Bakassi Peninsula* [also referred to as the "Greentree Agreement"] includes an outline of Cameroon's commitment towards Nigerians who decide to remain in the Peninsula (Cameroon and Nigeria 12 June 2006). Article 3 of the Agreement states the following:

1. Cameroon, after the transfer of authority to it by Nigeria, guarantees to Nigerian nationals living in the Bakassi Peninsula the exercise of the fundamental rights and freedoms enshrined in international human rights law and in other relevant provisions of international law.

2. In particular, Cameroon shall:

- (a) not force Nigerian nationals living in the Bakassi Peninsula to leave the Zone or to change their nationality;
- (b) respect their culture, language and beliefs;
- (c) respect their right to continue their agricultural and fishing activities;
- (d) protect their property and their customary land rights;
- (e) not levy in any discriminatory manner any taxes and other dues on Nigerian nationals living in the Zone; and
- (f) take every necessary measure to protect Nigerian nationals living in the Zone from any harassment or harm. (ibid., Art. 3)

In August 2008, following the final hand-over of the territory to Cameroon, the Cameroonian President reportedly reassured Nigerians in the Peninsula that their "safety and rights will continue to be guaranteed, [and that] they will be able as in the past, to continue their lives in peace as long as they abide by the laws of Cameroon" (UN 11 Sept. 2008). However, cited in an 11 September 2008 IRIN article, a Nigerian journalist claimed that many of the Bakassi residents returning to Nigeria had been "terrorised" by the Cameroonian authorities (ibid.). The journalist also claimed that the authorities of Cross Rivers State [southern Nigeria] were investigating allegations of Cameroonian soldiers killing Nigerians in the Peninsula (ibid.). Further or corroborating information on violence in the Peninsula could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

Reports of Nigerians in the Bakassi Peninsula being forced to give up their Nigerian citizenship or to take on Cameroonian citizenship 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 sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

## References

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### **Additional Sources Consulted**

**Internet sites, including:** Africa Research Bulletin, AllAfrica, Amnesty International (AI), European Country of Origin Information Network (ecoi.net), Factiva, Human Rights Watch (HRW), Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC), International Crisis Group, Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), ReliefWeb, Reuters - AlertNet, United Kingdom Home Office, United States Department of State.

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