

Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada

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Responses to Information Requests

Responses to Information Requests (RIR) respond to focused Requests for Information that are submitted to the Research Directorate in the course of the refugee protection determination process. The database contains a seven-year archive of English and French RIRs. Earlier RIRs may be found on the UNHCR's [Refworld](#) website.

13 November 2012

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Nigeria: Consequences for a Yoruba individual who refuses a chieftaincy title; protection available to those who refuse
Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Ottawa

1. Yoruba Chieftaincy Title Selection

Sources indicate that Yoruba chiefs are selected based on the traditions of each community (Advocate and Development Planner 17 Apr. 2012; IDMC 8 June 2012). Some Yoruba chieftaincy titles are hereditary and others are bestowed upon individuals (Chief 25 Sept. 2012; Emeritus Professor 16 Apr. 2012; Advocate and Development Planner 17 Apr. 2012).

1.1 Hereditary Titles

In correspondence with the Research Directorate, an Emeritus Professor of Anthropology and Sociology at the School of Oriental and African Studies at the University of London who has a "detailed knowledge" of the Yoruba speaking area (17 May 2012), indicated that chieftaincy titles, called "oye" in Yoruba, are usually inherited through male lineage, and rotate over time between different "chieftaincy houses" within the lineage (16 Apr. 2012). In correspondence with the Research Directorate, an Advocate and Development Planner in Nigeria who is a senior lecturer in Ogun State, has authored 40 publications and whose research includes community governance (18 May 2012), stated that in communities where chieftaincy and kingship titles are hereditary, such as in Ile-Ife [Osun State] and Offa [Kwara State], "only children from the royal families ... are entitled to the title" (Advocate and Development Planner 17 Apr. 2012).

The Emeritus Professor said that families are often divided in chieftaincy disputes as contestants for the same chieftaincy title may be from the same family (17 May 2012). According to the Emeritus Professor, "accepted membership of a family (i.e., by virtue of patrilineal descent from the family's founding ancestor) is a minimum condition of eligibility for a hereditary title limited to members of that family" (ibid.).

1.2 Non-hereditary Titles

The Advocate and Development Planner explained that in some communities where chieftaincy is not hereditary, "especially when the community or town is a community of strangers," such as in Ibadan and Oke-Igbo, chieftaincy titles are based on rotation and individuals wait in line for their titles until the chief or king dies (17 Apr. 2012). He said that "the next person is enthroned without argument" (Advocate and Development Planner 17 Apr. 2012.).

The Emeritus Professor stated that in some communities and in some cases, chieftaincy titles are "open" and are given to individuals as an "honorific" by the king, who is called the "oba" (16 Apr. 2012). Similarly, the Advocate and Development Planner indicated that in some communities, chieftaincy titles are given to "deserving persons outside royal families and lines of chiefs" (17 Apr. 2012). The Emeritus Professor said that the oba chooses new chiefs with the guidance of his council of senior chiefs who receive "much material recompense" in non-hereditary title selection (16 Apr. 2012). He added that major titles, including the oba title, "are often subject to intense competition, on account of the honour they bring, and contestants can spend much money (in the form of bribes or presents) to attain them," while minor titles "have less appeal and many of them as a result have fallen into abeyance" (Emeritus Professor 16 Apr. 2012). The Advocate and Development Planner also explained that titles can also be awarded to people who give the community's traditional leaders money (17 Apr. 2012). Similarly, the Emeritus Professor indicated

that contestants who bribe "kingmakers" for the oba-ship, or obas and other chiefs for other titles, may receive financial support from their family or friends and may borrow money (Emeritus Professor 17 May 2012). He said that "all such 'backers' would expect to get repaid in some way, in cash, influence, benefits from office, access to land, etc." (ibid.). The Emeritus Professor indicated that conflicts about chieftaincy titles often occur between the contestant's family and the king and council (16 Apr. 2012).

2. Consequences of Refusing a Yoruba Chieftaincy Title

Sources report that sometimes people refuse chieftaincy titles because they do not want to participate in rituals that the position involves (Emeritus Professor 16 Apr. 2012; Advocate and Development Planner 17 Apr. 2012). The Advocate and Development Planner explained that, although the refusal of chieftaincy titles is "very rare," some people refuse to participate in the required rituals and sacrifices due to their education, occupation, or religion, especially Christianity (ibid.; ibid. 18 May 2012). According to Bishop S.O.M Adebola, the taking of local or traditional chieftaincy titles is an "anti-Christian behavior" (Imaekhai 24 Mar. 2010). The Emeritus Professor stated that sometimes Christians and Muslims rejected these chieftaincy titles due to their "idolatrous rituals" (16 Apr. 2012). The Emeritus Professor added that, in this scenario, someone who was willing to participate in rituals "could always be found" (16 Apr. 2012). In contrast, the Advocate and Development Planner indicated that an individual who refuses a chieftaincy title because of the required rituals could be forced to accept the chieftaincy title by "chief makers" if the parents of the individual nominated him or her to succeed them before they died (17 Apr. 2012).

In a telephone interview with the Research Directorate, a Chief in Yoruba and Iboland and a former Commissioner of Local Government and Chieftaincy Affairs stated that, in the past, there were consequences to refusing a chieftaincy title (Chief 25 Sept. 2012). The Chief added that if the title was hereditary, a "serious reason" would have been required to refuse the title or there would have been consequences which differed depending on the tribe (ibid.). The Emeritus Professor stated that, in the past, when chieftaincy titles had "greater social significance," sometimes individuals rejected family titles that their families wanted them to accept (Emeritus Professor 16 Apr. 2012). However, he indicated that as far as he is aware, and "even in the past," there were no "serious sanctions" for refusals (16 Apr. 2012).

The Chief of Yoruba and Iboland and the Emeritus Professor indicated that there are presently no consequences to refusing a chieftaincy title (Chief 25 Sept. 2012; Emeritus Professor 16 Apr. 2012). In contrast, the Advocate and Development Planner stated that there are consequences for refusing a chieftaincy title (Advocate and Development Planner 18 May 2012). He said that a person who refuses a chieftaincy title could face challenges, threats, discrimination and danger from family, government authorities, community, or other societal actors (ibid. 17 Apr. 2012). He emphasized that this "happens and can happen anywhere" (ibid. 18 May 2012). The Advocate and Development Planner stated that "[a]t times, it might lead to loss of life of the person that refuses to be installed," and added that the killing of the person who refuses this chieftaincy title might be used as a deterrent to others to avoid disrespecting tradition (ibid. 17 Apr. 2012). The Advocate and Development Planner also stated that "many" people could cause problems for a person who refuses a chieftaincy title, especially if people believe that the status of their community will be improved if the person accepts the title (ibid.). He added that some government officials may also be unhappy with a person's refusal of a chieftaincy title, and may "use state machinery" against this individual (ibid.). Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

Nigerian media sources indicate that the Lagos State Governor rejected a chieftaincy title because he wanted to focus on governance (*Daily Trust* 11 Sept. 2012; *The Punch* 9 Sept. 2012). Further information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

According to the Lagos-based *Vanguard* newspaper, a Christian diocese in Amichi banned its members from the Ozo chieftaincy title (23 June 2011). Further information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

3. State Protection

The Advocate and Development Planner and the Emeritus Professor both stated that they were unaware of the existence of any state protection for individuals who refuse Yoruba chieftaincy titles (Advocate and Development Planner 17 Apr. 2012; Emeritus Professor 16 Apr. 2012). Further information 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

Advocate and Development Planner, Nigeria. 18 May 2012. Correspondence with the Research Directorate.

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Vanguard [Lagos]. 23 June 2011. Anayo Okoli. "Church Bans Chieftaincy Titles, Wedding for Pregnant Women, Others." <<http://www.vanguardngr.com/2011/06/church-bans-chieftaincy-titles-wedding-for-pregnant-women-others/>> [Accessed 20 Sept. 2012]

Additional Sources Consulted

Oral sources: Attempts to contact the following individuals and organizations were unsuccessful: anthropologist; Assistant Professor and Yoruba language researcher, University of Georgia; Associate Professor of political science and international affairs, Kennesaw State University; Director of the Centre for Diaspora and Transnational Studies, University of Toronto; lawyer and solicitor; Nigerian Institute of Advanced Legal Studies; Professor of African American Studies, University of New York; Professor of African Cultural Anthropology; Professor of Africana Studies and History, State University of New York; Professor and Chair of the sociology and anthropology department, Lincoln University; Professor in the Department of Archaeology and Anthropology, University of Ibadan; Professor of History, University of Texas; Professor of second language acquisition, Yoruba language and culture, University of Wisconsin; Professor, Stony Brook University; university lecturer in African history, Clare College Cambridge. The following could not provide information for this Response: Embassy of Nigeria in Ottawa; Emeritus Professor of African History, University of Stirling; Emeritus Professor and professorial research associate, University of London's School of Oriental and African Studies.

Internet sites, including: Africa Confidential; Africa Research Bulletin; African Studies Centre, University of Leiden; Al Jazeera; All Africa; Amnesty International; Australia – Refugee Review Tribunal; *Canadian Journal of African Studies*; Commonwealth Local Government Forum; *Current Research Journal of Social Sciences*; ecoinet; Factiva; Freedom House; Human Rights Watch; Ministry of Local Government and Chieftaincy Affairs – Akwa Ibom State, Edo State, Lagos State; Minority Rights Group International; Nigeria – Embassy of Nigeria in Ottawa; Nigerian Institute of Advanced Legal Studies; *This Day*; UK – Border Agency; United Nations – Integrated Regional Information Networks, Refworld; United States – Congressional Research Service, Department of State; World Organization Against Torture.

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