

Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada

[Home](#) > [Research Program](#) > Responses to Information Requests

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 April 2012

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Nigeria: The Reformed Ogboni Fraternity (ROF), including the nature of its belief system and its purpose; whether membership is compulsory, especially for children of members, and consequences for refusing to join the ROF; whether positions within the ROF are inherited
Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Ottawa

1. Structure and Nature of the Belief System

According to the website of the Reformed Ogboni Fraternity (ROF), the organization was founded on 18 December 1918 in Lagos, Nigeria (ROF 30 May 2010a). By May 2010, the organization had 940 *lledi* ("conclaves") in Nigeria, one in Cameroon, five in London, five in Italy and one in Belgium (ibid.). New ones were also being created in Italy, the US, Brazil and the West Indies (ibid.). The website also indicates that the ROF is a voluntary organization, "religious in character" and based on the belief "in the Fatherhood of God, Brotherhood of man and the immortality of souls" (ibid. 30 May 2010b). It is neither a "Secret Society" nor a religion (ibid.). Nevertheless, the ROF website indicates that members are encouraged to talk freely about the fraternity to counteract the "public's innuendos and misconceptions of the order [and] the continuous but unfortunate perception of what the ROF is and what it stands for" (30 May 2010c).

In correspondence with the Research Directorate, Insa Nolte, an assistant professor of African studies at the University of Birmingham, asserted that the ROF is not a cult in the typical sense of the term, but rather a highly syncretic organization that draws on Christianity and traditional Yoruba practices (Nolte 3 Apr. 2012). Nolte also said that the ROF is not associated with organized crime (3 Apr. 2012).

Peter Hunziker, a researcher specializing in Africa who is cited in a report published by the Austrian Centre for Country of Origin and Asylum Research and Documentation (ACCORD), says that the ROF [translation] "pursues the same objectives as the Ogboni, namely to form a network that promotes its supporters politically and economically and supports them in their public functions" (ACCORD 17 June 2011, Sec. 6.3).

1.1 Nature of the Ogboni Institution

William Idowu, a philosophy professor at Obafemi Awolowo University in Nigeria (Brunel University n.d.; Academic Journals n.d.) writing in the *Nordic Journal of African Studies* in 2005, indicates that the Ogboni group is a "powerful traditional institution [that] represent[s] the traditional attitude [in the] "moral, legal, social and political life" of the Yoruba (Idowu 2005, 177). He indicates that the group "wield[s] utmost constitutional powers" in the religious, judicial and political spheres, and that its members are the *de facto* lawmakers in their respective enclaves (ibid., 185). He explains that this power arises from the Ogboni's control of the political life of their respective communities as well as from the conception that they "possess the power of the sanctions of the gods," which gives them the status of "the most dreaded institution in Yoruba land" in southwestern Nigeria (ibid., 175, 185). According to Idowu, the "Ogboni cult" continues to be as influential as before, although its importance as a law maker has diminished "significantly" (ibid., 185, 190).

According to Idowu, the Ogboni institution's main goal is to promote law and order in their respective communities according to the "laws of the gods," thereby creating an "awareness" that sin is a punishable offence against the norms of society and that "acts of sacrifice and rites of purification only remedy serious crimes" (Idowu 2005, 188). Idowu further emphasizes that "the Ogboni cult ensures that moral injunctions and laws of the gods are observed while strict punishment is brought to bear on the person who violates the rules and regulations (custom) of

the people" since "punishment and sanctions are the sole prerogatives of the gods" (ibid., 188-189).

Idowu also maintains that the Ogboni group is a "secret group" since "[n]o one, except members can really know the depths of its practices" (ibid., 185). Other academics also describe the Ogboni as a "secret cult" (Ajayi, Ekundayo and Osalusi 2010, 155) or a "secret societ[y]" (Adogame Oct. 2010, 481).

2. Aims and Objectives

With regard to the aims and objects of the ROF, the website indicates the following:

- To associate for the promotion of the Principle of Universal Fatherhood of God - the All-Seeing Eye, and Universal Brotherhood of Man, without any discrimination as to Race, Colour, Creed, Sex, Religion or Political Affiliation.
- To associate for the principal purpose of knowing God better such that all the undertakings of the fraternity will be in accordance with His Holy will.
- To encourage the diffusion of the practice of benevolence, charity and chastity.
- To offer assistance (as a bounding duty) to all poor and distressed members and non-members, without detriment to themselves and their connections, or injustice to others who are not members of this Fraternity.
- To see to the mortal remains of any deceased members by providing a coffin or financial assistance up to a reasonable cost and to give his/her remains a decent deposit in the bosom of Mother Earth.
- To inculcate in all members, the constant practice of the Golden Rule, "to do unto others (members and non-members) as one would wish them to do unto him
- To provide necessary funds for the successful prosecution of the business of the Fraternity, according to this Constitution.
- To keep and obey the Laws and Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria and those of any other Country in which one resides. (ROF 30 May 2010d)

With regard to this last point, the ROF clarifies that the organization does not represent any particular political interest (ibid. 30 May 2010b). The ROF also indicates that the organization teaches "kindness at home, honesty in business, courtesy in society, fairness in work, pity and concern for the unfortunate, resistance towards the wicked, help for the weak, forgiveness for the penitent, love for one another and above all, reverence and LOVE for God" (ibid.).

3. Membership

The website of the ROF indicates that the society is open to "all men and women [who are] honest and law abiding with a good spiritual belief in almighty God regardless of ... religious background" (n.d). According to the ROF constitution, persons wanting to join the organization must meet the following criteria:

- Membership shall be opened to all who embrace a non-idolatrous faith in God.
- An applicant for membership shall be at least Twenty One years (21), if male, and Forty years old (40) if Female, PROVIDED that any applicant who is the wife of a member may be initiated if she is not less than Thirty years old (30).
- A member may propose for admission a female offspring or near relation who is a spinster or divorcee of not less than Thirty years (30) of age on giving a written undertaking of good behaviour of such applicant.
- Any female applicant who is married at the time of application and whose husband is not a member of the fraternity must produce a letter of consent from her husband. (ROF 30 May 2010d, Sec. 2)

Section 15 of the Constitution further details the requirements and procedures for initiation and enrolment of new members as follows:

Applicant shall write an application naming three (3) members as referees of which at least preferably two (2) shall be members of that Iledi. All applications for membership shall be submitted to the Apena of the Conclave for the onward consideration of the Executive Body. Applications shall be read by the Apena at the open Conclave meeting and after there is no preliminary objection the applicant shall be issued with form. Applications and admission fees which shall be determined from time to time by the Supreme Council shall be paid by the Applicant to the Apena in the presence of one (1) of his/her sponsors. There shall be a Character Investigation Committee in every Conclave. No candidate shall be admitted until thorough investigation as to his/her character has been made by that Committee which reports its findings to the Executive Body of the Conclave for final decisions. In the case of a female candidate, the applicant shall further be introduced or referred to the Iyabiye and her Erelu together with a copy of the completed form 3 for thorough enquiries, and their report shall be passed to the Executive Body of the Iledi. It shall be the duty of the Apena of every Conclave to send Notice of application for admission on R.O.F. Form 4 to:- The Conclaves in the Division in which the home town or birth place of the applicant is situated. The Conclaves in the Region in which the applicant seeks admission, and The Central Registry of the Fraternity, at the Reformed Ogboni Fraternity Headquarters, 38 Abeokuta Street, Ebute-Metta, Lagos, Nigeria. Thereafter the Apena of the Conclave shall, at the next Idaji meeting of the Conclave read out the particulars of the Applicant of the Conclaves as stated in the R.O.F. form 4 so that all

members may be aware of the particulars of the applicant. The name shall be read out at two (2) more subsequent monthly Idaji meeting for all members to make enquiries about the Candidate and to have opportunity to raise an objection privately to any member of the Executive Committee of the Conclave. (i) The details of the Candidate must be presented to the Divisional Council of the Conclaves to which the application is directed for the consideration and approval or rejection of the Divisional Council before the initiation of the Candidate. (ii) The candidate shall be interviewed by the Executive Body of the Conclave to determine his/her suitability. (iii) If there is no objection by any member of the Conclave or members of the Fraternity or from any other Conclave within the stipulated 3 months and approval of the Divisional Council the Candidate may be initiated in open Conclave. Candidate (male/female) for initiated must be presented to the Iyabiye before they are initiated. If the candidate is rejected either by any member of the Conclave itself or by any member in the Branches or in any Region or division or from the Headquarters of the Fraternity, his/her name shall be forwarded to the Divisional Council to which the Conclave belongs and the Central Registry of the Fraternity for record purpose. Objection to a candidate shall be on reasonable grounds; and what is reasonable in this connection is primarily a matter for the Division, and if necessary an appeal shall lie to the Executive Council. All candidates shall be initiated according to the approved rituals before enrolment as members after rituals in open Conclave and in regular Idaji Meeting day. By special dispensation of the Olori Oluwo and/or the Olori Apena on behalf of the Supreme Council, a deserving candidate may be initiated without the above formalities. (ibid. 30 May 2010d)

Nolte indicated in her correspondence that forced recruitment is not a problem within the ROF since members can only join formally when they are of legal age and deemed of good character (3 Apr. 2012). She concluded by stating that children of members are not automatically members of the ROF (Nolte 3 Apr. 2012).

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.

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Additional Sources Consulted

Oral sources: Attempts to contact professors from the following universities were unsuccessful: Stanford University, Oxford University, University of Ottawa, University of Florida, University of California, Obafemi Awolowo University.

Internet sites, including: African Journals Online; African Studies Center, University of Pennsylvania; Amnesty International; Centre for African Studies, Dalhousie University; ecoi.net; Factiva; GERDDES-AFRICA; International Association of Nigerian Studies and Development; Institute for the Study of International Development, McGill University; National Library of Australia; The Nordic Africa Institute; Ogboni Fraternity of the Christians; United Nations Refworld.

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[Top of Page](#)
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