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14 January 2005

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Nigeria : Availability of false documents in and from Nigeria (2002-2004)
Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board, Ottawa

According to a report of the African Human Security Initiative published on the Website of the Institute for Security Studies (ISS), in theory, the systems in place in Nigeria to prevent forgeries of identification documents include a system of "barcode[s] and watermarks" (n.d.). However, in practice, corruption has increased the availability of forgeries (ibid. n.d.).

According to the *Report From a Fact-Finding Trip to Nigeria (Abuja, Kaduna and Lagos) 23-28 February 2004* prepared by the Norwegian Directorate of Immigration and Immigration Appeals Board, corruption is found "on all levels of the administration" (Oct. 2004, Sec. 5.1). The report also states that "genuine documents with false information constitute as big a problem as falsified documents" (Norway Oct. 2004, Sec. 5.1). One of the main reasons is that "[g]overnment authorities seldom have routines for verifying the information going into official documents" (ibid.).

Genuine passports can easily be obtained by providing a birth certificate, which is often issued based solely on information provided by the person requesting it (ibid., Sec. 5.1.1). The Norwegian report also states that it may be possible to pay bribes to officials to issue valid identification cards containing incorrect information (ibid. Sec. 5.1.2).

One of the biggest frauds to date in Nigeria has been the "4-1-9" scam or "advance fee fraud," named "after the section of the Nigeria penal code which addresses fraud schemes" (United States n.d.). The scam works through e-mails and letters promising "multi-million dollar windfall profits for doing absolutely nothing" (ibid.). The scam is also successful partly because unsuspecting recipients receive forged documents (ibid.). The documents seem to have "official looking stamps, seals and logo testifying to the authenticity of the proposal" (ibid.).

To combat the prevalence of forged documents originating from Nigeria, in 2003 Spain gave a "fake document detector worth [Nigeria

Nairas] 28 million [equivalent to 255,097.00 CAD (XE 30 Dec. 2004)]to the Nigerian immigration service" (*This Day* 23 Aug. 2003).

False documents in Nigeria have been reported in the following specific instances.

Acting on reports received from the British High Commission in Nigeria in 2004, Nigerian police "arrested 25 visa seekers who [had] submitted forged documents" to the Commission's visa section (*This Day* 29 Nov. 2004). The British High Commission announced concurrently that it would continue to check for forgeries among such submitted identification documents as "bank statements, income tax certificates, invitation letters, employment letters, passport copies etc." (ibid.).

The *Daily Mail* of London reported on 18 December 2004 that "three Nigerian computer experts [had been running] two 'fraud factories'." The criminals were arrested in the United Kingdom because they had been supplying fake passports, for 800 pounds sterling each [\$1,812 CAD (XE.com 13 Jan. 2005)], as well as credit cards, "birth certificates, death certificates, National Insurance cards, utility bills and bank statements" (*Daily Mail* 18 Dec. 2004). It is unclear from the article whether the criminals were producing forged Nigerian or British documents.

The *P.M. News* also reported that visa forgeries are given to "unsuspecting victims under the guise of obtaining travel documents" (30 Sept. 2004).

Another forgery scam was reported involving a "polytechnic in southwest Nigeria" that expelled approximately 2370 students "for forging their admission credentials" (Iafrica.com 22 Jan. 2004).

There are also media reports of Nigerian import companies trying to declare false goods and falsify documents at ports in Nigeria "to defraud the federal government of [tax] revenue" (*Daily Trust* 20 Nov. 2003; see also *Vanguard* 2 Sept. 2003).

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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Internet sites, including : AllAfrica.com, Amnesty International, Freedom House, Human Rights Watch, Online Nigeria.

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