

Coalition For Fairness To Nigeria Speak Out on Nigeria, America Relations

By Nichole Davis
Staff Writer

U.S. sanctions against Nigeria are shortsighted and unfair argued members of the Coalition for Fairness to Nigeria during a press conference Friday.

"They (U.S. State Department officials) have a

double standard when it comes to sanctions," said Coalition Chairman Rev. Maurice Dawkins. "They are treating Nigeria differently than Red China and Korea, and that's not fair."

U. S. officials are reportedly unhappy about the proposed timetable for complete

democracy in the country. Nigerian Head of State Gen. Sani Abacha proposed a three year timetable in an Independence Day speech on Oct. 1, but State Department officials said that was too long to wait. They were also upset about the "unclear" final status of several political prisoners. Among those

imprisoned is M.K.O. Abiola, a Yoruba chief and businessman. He was charged with treason in early 1994, a crime punishable by death, after declaring himself president of the country. Abiola was the winner of a 1993 presidential election, which was nullified by the Supreme Court due to allegations of fraud,

bribery and vote-rigging. Abacha has refused to release Abiola saying:

"Until such time as when Chief Abiola is judged guilty or innocent of the charges preferred against him, it would be wrong and a poor precedent for the democratic system for which we are laying a foundation to invoke executive fiat in a matter that is still before the courts."

Abacha did, however, show some flexibility to some of the other prisoners. He commuted 40 sentences. These prisoners were convicted of mutiny in early 1995 after a reported coup attempt. Former Nigerian President Gen. Olusegun Obasanjo was among those granted clemency.

Commutations aside, U.S. officials remain unconvinced of Abacha's commitment to democracy and opted to maintain current sanctions against the country.

"The United States is disappointed by the Nigerian government's failure to announce credible steps to return Nigeria promptly to democratic rule," said White House officials.

The Friday press conference was held in response to the decision. Members of the WCBPA along with the executive board of the National Newspaper Publishers Association toured five Nigerian cities recently and spoke to people from all walks of life about politics and life in general. The trip was paid for by the Nigerian government in an effort to improve relations between U.S. and Nigerian press personnel.

The government's efforts seem to have paid off. Coalition members, some of whom belong to the WCBPA and/or the NNPA, now believe U.S. sanctions against Nigeria are too punitive. Further, they believe the U.S. doesn't recognize the steps Nigeria has taken towards democracy.

"People look at Nigeria as if it should be a finished product," said Dr. N.K. Onuoha Chukunta, president of the Nigerian Eagles Society. "How can you expect us after 35 years as (Randall) Robinson said to be a bellwether of the African community."

Said Maurice Dawkins Jr., a member of the delegation to

Nigeria, "If you want to look at this from a historical perspective, examine the U.S. at the same point in its' history."

"Yes," agreed Chukunta shaking his head, "in contrast to the U.S. where we still struggle with affirmative action. If everything in the U.S. was so perfect, why did we need a Million Man March?"

"You're looking at a nation in the making," continued Chukunta, who spoke at a dinner later that night on the same topic. "We are trying to merge many nationalities into one."

According to Chukunta are 250 different ethnolinguistic groups in Nigeria. That means there are 250 mutually unintelligible languages spoken in Nigeria. This phenomena occurred, because conquerors created artificial boundaries for the country to stabilize trade routes. Former city states each with their own language and culture were simply thrown together. The result was chaos when the English finally left several years ago.

When cooler heads finally prevailed, the government made attempts to establish democracy. Both the American and British forms were tried, but both styles of government failed. Coalition members cited the ethnolinguistic factor as the main reason. Past failures aside, Coalition members argue that Abacha is now making a genuine effort to establish democracy, and the U.S. should accept that it will take some time to iron out problems.

"We are of the impression that they are in good faith in establishing a republican government," said Dawkins, Sr. "Political prisoners have had their sentences commuted. Certainly, that shows good faith on the president's part. Of course, there are things we don't know, but if there is a change in what was said we would not be reluctant to tell the president of the United States."

Said Celes King III, state chair of the Congress of Racial Equality of California, "In the short term, there is no reason for the U.S. not to honor the good faith that Nigeria has made and respond accordingly."

Local NAACP Looks To Freedom Fund Banquet

By Victor S. Ingram

Local NAACP members are gearing up for their annual Freedom Fund Banquet. The event, slated for November 3, 1995 at Ballys Hotel and Casino, is the primary fund raiser for the historic non-profit civil rights organization. Nationally, the group is currently restructuring its balance sheet and recovering from dramatic upheavals in

management. Merlie Evers-Williams took over as president several months ago following the controversial dismissal of executive director Benjamin Chavis.

Members of the local chapter, however, downplay national shifts in management, choosing to focus on recent inroads which include securing a stand-alone building. Located at the

intersection of Owens and "H" Street the building marks the first time the local branch has had its own facility. Additionally, this year's banquet has already produced a resounding response from private and corporate sponsors, says banquet organizer Jerry Whitsett. The guest speaker for the event will be the acting national executive director, Earl T. Shinhoster.

Shinhoster is responsible for national coordination of NAACP field operations and programs. He has been active in the NAACP for nearly three decades. He is listed in the 1980 edition of Outstanding Young Men of America and has been cited and recognized by numerous NAACP units, organizations and institutions. Tickets can be obtained by calling 657-0599.

Bob Stupak proposes \$100,000 for arrest of Tony Bagley assailant

By Victor S. Ingram

Looking gaunt and fatigued, yet carrying an aura of the quick tempered, savvy Las Vegas gambler, Bob Stupak held a press conference on Monday, October 30.

Recently the victim of a near-fatal motorcycle crash, Stupak's

conference, however, was in support of another victim. The longtime casino owner offered \$100,000 towards the arrest and prosecution of the gunman responsible for the 1994 Halloween shooting of 7-year-old trick-or-treater Tony Bagley. Bagley was shot, to the horror of

a community, by an unknown assailant while he was out for annual Halloween festivities. The shooting galvanized the community against senseless violence.

Stupak, during the press conference, emptied a paper bag full of \$100 bills, announcing the

reward at the North Las Vegas Police Station. "This is probably the most important press conference I've ever held," says Stupak. "I'm here for a simple reason. Tony Bagley is not here anymore. He's never going to be here. But I'm here. I know how nice it is to be alive."

SENATOR HARRY REID CONGRATULATES RENO POLICE LT. ONDRA BERRY

WASHINGTON, DC — U.S. Senator Harry Reid congratulates Reno Police Lieutenant Ondra Berry, his wife Margo and son Jarel on Mr. Barry's graduation from the FBI Academy. Lieutenant Berry spent several months in Washington, D.C., attending university classes and undergoing rigorous physical training as part of FBI training.

Senator Reid and the Berry family discussed the need for



more police officers and better training in order to fight crime in America's communities. Senator Reid told the Berry family that the Reno Police Department had recently received more than \$450,000 in COPS Grants. These popular grants were specifically designed in the 1994 Crime Bill to get more law enforcement professionals out onto the streets.

"Nothing brings down the quality of life more than the feeling of being threatened or unsafe," Reid said. "I hope these grants will help professionals like Lieutenant Berry lead more officers out onto the streets and forge relationships within the community to prevent the spread of crime. Lieutenant Berry's family and the families of every law enforcement professional in this state should be very proud of what these brave men and women do each and every day to make our streets safe."

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