

Nigeria

(Continued from Page 1)

release was imminent. Even harsh critics of the Nigerian government under Gen. Abacha applauded.

"We were extremely encouraged by Major General Abdulsalam Abubakar's release of some 26 prominent political prisoners," Congressional Black Caucus (CBC) Chair Maxine Waters (D-Calif.) told FCN.

"We all must bear some responsibility for the death," she said however, because there was never enough pressure put on Gen. Abacha's government to force the release of Mr. Abiola or to insist on his access to adequate medical care.

"We were also encouraged by U.N. Secretary General Kofi Annan's statement following his meeting with General Abubakar that he believed all remaining political prisoners would be released. (Gen. Abubakar has) shown some good signs.

His opening up the jail to allow our diplomats to be able to talk to Mr. Abiola ... (and) his willingness to have an autopsy done (were) all good signs. I'm hopeful," the CBC Chair continued.

"I hope that the sad lessons of death will provide us all an opportunity to be supportive of the possibility of Nigeria getting on the right track and becoming the kind of country that can prosper and grow and treat its people right," Rep. Waters said.

In fact, Gen. Abubakar's recent dissolution of the Cabinet appointed by Gen. Abacha was a sign that he might establish a so-called "national unity" government.

"When the new Head of State came to power, he called for national reconciliation," the Nigerian Embassy spokesman said. "He said he will return

the country to a democratic government. He said also that he wants to return the military to the barracks, and make them function to carry out their constitutional responsibility as a military, defending the country's territorial integrity."

Mr. Hoffman, who has traveled often to Nigeria, leading delegations to observe the local election process there, agrees that Gen. Abubakar has been leading the transition in the right direction. "The (inclusion of critics of Gen.



Sani Abacha

Abacha's government) would be a unifying gesture that would go a long way in getting Nigeria out of the malaise and into the next phase of its development," said Mr. Hoffman.

"There are a number of very credible Nigerian politicians and leaders who are anxious to become part of the legitimate process....

"There are leaders who are former members of government, who are businessmen, who are community or local leaders — I think they will be engaged. If the military government extends a hand to them, I think we will see quite a bit of participation by them."

Shortly after Mr. Abiola's death, there were calls among some Nigerian expatriates for the partitioning of the country into ethnic enclaves.

That would be a grave mistake, according to the Hon.

Louis Farrakhan, leader of the Nation of Islam, and a friend of both Gen. Abacha and Chief Abiola.

"I appeal to all those who love Nigeria: you have to see the bigger picture," the Nation of Islam leader told FCN. "So the question is: What is the bigger picture, where Nigeria is concerned? ... Even though there are Nigerian citizens who have legitimate grievances against military government, corruption in the government, against this and that, which has



Abdulsalam Abubakar

brought pain and suffering and abuse to the Nigerian people, the bigger picture is: Do you want to aid in the destruction of Nigeria, so that the forces outside of Nigeria can laugh and say that Africa will never get up off the ground because they have succeeded in getting Hausa, Ibo, Yoruba, and all of the different ethnic groups in Nigeria to fight each other, to kill each other?"

Mr. Hoffman agrees that government critics, both inside and outside the country, should temper their hostility for the time being.

"We've been seeing, I think to their discredit, many American critics, predicting chaos, seemingly almost hoping for chaos in Nigeria. Even with the tragic death of (Mr.) Abiola, there has not been that kind of chaos. Calm has been restored.

"We're still seeing rhetoric

coming from some quarters in the African-American community calling for sanctions, calling for no relenting (of) pressure on the new Nigerian government, and I think that is counter-productive rhetoric, and that is not the kind of policy we should be looking at at this stage," he said.

"The (Nigerian people) have to look at the party system. They have to revive the party system, along the lines of truly representative national parties," Mr. Hoffman continued, suggesting that "it's completely unreasonable for that process to occur in the next few months. Look at a six month to 12 month period before a hand-over" of power from the military to any new civilian government can take place.

Finally, he said, the United States should encourage Nigeria to invite Americans from non-governmental organizations to act as consultants and observers. Black newspaper publishers and some civil rights leaders are prime candidates.

Indeed, Waters is now willing to visit the country. "Should an invitation be extended, I would be willing to go," Waters said during a recent interview.

NY Times: Married blacks are having less children

Special to Sentinel-Voice

NEW YORK — Married, middle-class black families increasingly are having smaller families, a result of higher incomes, more education and movement away from relatives who can help with child care, *The New York Times* reported Tuesday.

"I've talked to numerous African-American parents who really are very serious about making sure their children are having rich, rewarding experiences so that they start life with an advantage and not disadvantage," said William Turner, a professor of family studies at the University of Kentucky.

In 1970, married black women gave birth to 357,262 babies, the *Times* said.

In 1996, the last year for which statistics are available, the figure was 179,568, a decline of nearly 50 percent and nearly twice the drop in the birth rate among married white women.

Experts say the trend means that married black couples — whose median income is approaching parity with whites — are able to give their children more of the advantages of enhanced economic status, like better housing and schools and more opportunities for cultural enrichment.

"If I can produce two responsible adults, I'm happy," said Wanda Newman, 44, a teacher in Prince Georges County, Md., and the married mother of two teen-age sons.

"If they can go to college, get out and work, have a solid religious background, I don't feel bad about not having any more."

The trend of married blacks having fewer children means a higher percentage of black children are born outside marriage.

However, the percentage of single black women giving birth reached a 40-year low in 1996.

Celebrity

(Continued from Page 6)

job. It is an old corporate recruiting trick. When the top candidates are Black, assert that you can't find anyone.

Our contribution to this trend has been to revel in the glamour of stardom, instead of leveraging the access to wealth into permanent economic growth.

The sports and entertainment agent system has also been a major detriment to our combining resources to create movie studios and television networks or to own sports teams. Contrast the vulnerability of Black stars dodging the IRS or going into bankruptcy with the death of Roy Rogers.

Rogers hadn't lifted a guitar for 40 years, but he owned all rights to his name and likeness, controlled enough land for his

own state and built his own museum complete with a stuffed Trigger and his dog. His trails were happy because he owned them. And Rogers' money machine only picked up steam when he died.

On a more pedestrian level, us regular folks are trying to be like the stars, attempting to project the Hollywood image on lunch box budgets.

Three-fourths of our young

men expect to play professional sports. Bert Williams was on the verge of deciding to stop crying the tears of a clown. Many of today's acts still think it is cool to be a fool. Actually, it will be colder than ice if we don't make better use of our success.

John William Templeton is executive editor of "Griot," the African-American, African and Caribbean business daily.

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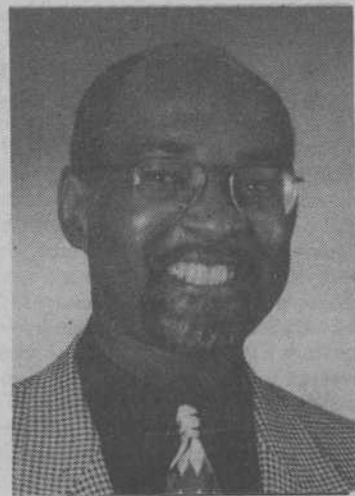
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