

# Nigerians proceed with national work stoppage

LAGOS, Nigeria (AP) - A nationwide strike to protest fuel price hikes shut down Nigeria's commercial capital on Monday, emptying the streets of most traffic except soldiers and anti-riot police in armored vehicles.

The government and the Nigeria Labor Congress, a 29-union umbrella group, set the stage for the strike when they failed to reach an agreement Friday on government-supported fuel prices.

"The strike is on. Nigerians are united over this," said union spokesman Owei Lakemfa.

Pumping 2.5 million barrels of oil daily, Nigeria is Africa's main crude producer, the world's seventh-largest oil exporter and fifth-largest source of U.S. oil imports. Union leaders are demanding the government reverse price hikes last month that saw gas prices rise by nearly 20 percent to about \$1.50 a gallon, the latest in a series of increases as the gov-



The President of the Nigeria Labour Congress Adams Oshiomhole (C) leads a procession of workers during a protest rally by the congress in Abuja.

ernment cut subsidies in a deregulation push. Nigeria is Africa's largest producer of crude. The hikes set off widespread protests.

Adams Oshiomhole, president of the Nigeria Labor Congress, accused President Olusegun Obasanjo of

shunning dialogue to resolve union grievances. He spoke publicly Sunday for the first time since security forces detained and later released him on Saturday in the capital, Abuja.

"If the president is not willing to talk, there's nothing anyone can do,"

Oshiomhole told reporters. "The strike begins tomorrow (Monday) because we have no alternative."

In Lagos, banks, shops and schools were closed while soldiers and anti-riot police were out in force, patrolling

the central business district in armored vehicles.

Oshiomhole was detained Saturday morning by state security police at Abuja's international airport as he was waiting for a flight to a southern Nigeria city.

A 15-member team of security forces "overpowered him, wrestled him to the ground and bundled him into a standby car," his union said in a statement, citing witnesses.

Oshiomhole said he was released Saturday evening, after which he went to a hospital for treatment of bruises sustained during the detention.

He did not say why officials had detained him. Information Minister Chukwemeka Chikelu said Saturday the detention was the result of a "misunderstanding with some low-level security officials."

A general strike in Nigeria last year shut down businesses in the largest city,

Lagos, and several other cities for eight days, leading to a violent government crackdown in which police killed at least 11 protesters. Crude oil exports, however, were unaffected.

"The Nigerian police must not be an instrument of terrorism," said Oshiomhole.

The country's blue-collar oil union, the National Union of Petroleum and Natural Gas Workers of Nigeria, and the White-collar oil workers union, the Petroleum and Natural Gas Senior Staff Association of Nigeria, have said they will join the strike.

A coalition of Nigerian civic groups and opposition parties, including the main opposition All Nigerian People's Party, have also expressed support for the strike.

After the first four days there will be a break of two weeks to give the government time to reverse the price increases, failing which there will be an indefinite general strike, said union officials.

## Gadhafi's son: Libya forsakes Middle East

TRIPOLI, Libya (AP) - The son of Libyan leader Moammar Gadhafi proposed a new plan for general reforms in which he said his country will move away from the Middle East and reduce spending on the military.

"Libya has decided to separate from the so-called Middle East," Seif al-Islam Gadhafi said at the opening session of a Tripoli conference for business leaders from Western countries.

Gadhafi said he is proposing a new reform plan that will include major cuts in military expenditure.

"There is no need anymore to continue spending on the military field," he said. "Instead, we will direct such spending to development."

The conference opened a day after the European Union ended 12 years of sanctions against Libya and eased an arms embargo to reward the North African country for giving up efforts to develop weapons of mass destruction.

Gadhafi said the decision heralded "a new era for the Libyan-Western relationship."

The decision by 25 EU foreign ministers followed last year's decision by the U.N. Security Council to lift 11-year-old U.N. sanctions against Tripoli. The United States last April lifted most of its commercial sanctions, but left in place trade restrictions that include an arms embargo.

"The Libyan markets are open for investment by all the countries around the world after the lifting of U.S. and European sanctions," Gadhafi said.

Meanwhile, Libyan Prime Minister Shokri Ghanem said that Libya will soon be removed from the U.S. State Department's list of state sponsors of terrorism, which substantially restricts commercial activities between the two countries.

U.S.-Libyan relations have been transformed since 2003, when Gadhafi's government accepted responsibility, and agreed to pay compensation, for the bombing of a Pan Am airliner over Lockerbie, Scotland, in 1988.

It also agreed to dismantle its programs for weapons of mass destruction and allow U.N., American and British inspectors to visit the facilities.

## Rwanda builds houses for ex-refugees

Special to Sentinel-Voice from RIN

The Rwandan government has built 300,000 low-cost mud-brick houses in a program known locally as "Imidugudu," to resettle thousands of refugees who have returned since fleeing the country's 1994 genocide.

About 4 million people fled the country, and at least 1 million of them had returned to Rwanda by the end of 1994.

But many homes were burnt down during the 100-day genocide, and the country was left with a severe housing shortage.

Among the returnees were "old" groups of refugees, most of whom had spent 35 years in exile in Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Tanzania and Uganda, as well as those who had fled at the height of the genocide.

"Receiving both groups of new and old refugees in a very short period, reconstructing destroyed houses and stabilizing the population displaced by the war were very big challenges," Jean Damascene Ntawukurirayayo, the minister for infrastructure, told IRIN on Monday.

## Bush Women

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perimeter, a defiant boxer staring down an advancing, unseen enemy.

Brown's "Made to Disorder" opened on the frozen tableau of Afua Hall, Isabel Lewis, Rossalyn Quaye and Kristin Taylor. The quartet scattered as Tracy Chapman's "Behind the Wall" described a late-night domestic disturbance. One dancer slid onto a table; alternately huddling and writhing, she embodied both the sleepless neighbors and the victim of abuse.

Less successful were solos by Shani Collins and Trebien Pollard — the lone "Bush Man," whose work labored under a heavy-handed text.

Collins' "... But Some of Us are Brave" mined a similar vein as Brown's piece. Even without the program notes describing a "performance piece on breaking the silence of Black women's sexual experiences," the intent would be clear — too clear. Collins is a compelling dancer, but her choreography had too little substance to serve as partner or counterpoint to the work's singular message.

The program also included work by Laurie Carlos, Treva Offutt and founding Urban Bush Women member Robin Wilson, whose solo, "Delicacies," completed the night.

The Rwandan government introduced the Imidugudu settlement policy in December 1996. Since the policy focused on group settlement the government hoped to solve the problem of land scarcity at the same time.

The government considered the Imidugudu most suitable for people in rural areas because the returnees would be able to mobilize self-defense units against gangs of militiamen that still roamed the countryside.

The militia, known as Interahamwe, have largely been accused of perpetrating the genocide.

However, although more than 1 million people had been placed in the Imidugudu settlements, a national survey conducted in September

1999 by the Information Management Unit of the UN Development Program (UNDP) found that there were some 370,000 vulnerable families living under plastic sheeting in damaged shelters and others were temporarily occupying other people's homes. The figure of those living under these conditions currently is 180,000, according to government statistics.

Although the Imidugudu scheme is in its eighth year, many donors remain skeptical about the program; citing reports of "coerced" relocations, the lack of popular participation in the process of home design, plot-size, decision-making and other aspects of planning and resettlement-policy implementation.

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