

**THE WOLE SOYINKA PROJECT**

*TRUTH, MEMORY AND RECONCILIATION*

**A Student Dialogue**

February 20, 2002

Presented by

**THE ECHO FOUNDATION**

Hosted by

**Providence High School  
1800 Pineville-Matthews Road  
Charlotte, NC**

Sponsored by



The Echo Foundation offers these resource materials and collection of essays as an inspiration to you who share the next generation. We challenge you to search each day for opportunities to weave lessons of compassion, respect for all people and ethical decision making into every subject area; to teach children not to be indifferent to the suffering of others and to take a stand for justice; to believe in themselves, that they too have the power to make a difference...indeed, that it is their moral obligation to do so.

*Stephanie G. Ansaldo*  
Founder and President



WOLE SOYINKA

“From within the same continent, two strategies of confrontation with one’s history. They are offsprings of the same age, sprung from minds of a shared identity, and they appear to complement yet contradict each other. Both depend on a process of baring the truth of one’s history in order to exorcise the past and secure a collective peace of mind, the healing of a bruised racial psyche. Both concepts even appear to play a game with each other—in the mind at least—since some form of mental reconciliation appears to be provoked for their cohabitation. How on earth does one reconcile reparations, or recompense, with reconciliation or remission of wrongs? Dare we presume that both, in their differing ways, are committed to ensuring the righting of wrongs and the triumph of justice?”

*Wole Soyinka*

*Nobel Literature Prize, 1986*

*From his collected essays, “THE BURDEN OF TRUTH, THE MUSE OF FORGIVENESS”*



# THE WOLE SOYINKA PROJECT:

## *Truth, Memory and Reconciliation*

### Table of Contents

<b>Foreword</b> .....	1
<b>Wole Soyinka's Life</b>	
A Biography.....	2
A Chronology.....	3
<b>An Introduction to Nigeria</b>	
Introduction.....	7
Map.....	8
<b>The Universal Declaration of Human Rights</b>	
The Universal Declaration of Human Rights .....	9
Discussion Question on the Declaration.....	15
<b>Works of Wole Soyinka</b>	
Bibliography.....	16
"Wole Soyinka's Gift to the World".....	17
"Bringer of Peace" (with questions).....	20
"Her Joy is Wild" (with questions).....	21
"Luo Plains" (with questions).....	22
Excerpts from <i>Ake: The Years of Childhood</i> (with questions).....	23
<b>Politics in Nigeria and Soyinka's Activism</b>	
Political Nigeria, Past and Present.....	25
Nigeria: Human Rights Defenders Under Attack.....	29
"Take a Stand, Mandela!".....	35
"Wole Soyinka on the Rot in Nigeria".....	38
"Nigerian Nobel Prize Winner Uses Pen and Voice to Campaign Democracy".....	42
"Your Logic Frightens Me, Mandela".....	44
<b>Discussion Questions on Politics in Nigeria</b> .....	46
Sources.....	47
<b>Appendix: The Echo Foundation information</b>	

## Foreword

Not often are we fortunate to come across a person who so passionately, yet so eloquently, conveys the simple messages of human rights and dignity. Yet, in Wole Soyinka, a Nobel Prize-winning author and advocate for the dignities that all people desire, we find a man who mixes intellect, wit, humor, and urgency in his art.

In the following collection of educational resources, we have sought to provide you, the student or educator, with the necessary tools to delve deeper into not only the man, but the message, of Wole Soyinka. Read *his* words. Read the words about him and begin to discover the beauty of his language and the urgency of his goals.

In a world where we are often met with questions and uncertainties, let us be assured that human rights for all people are a must. With this truth in mind, appreciate Soyinka's lectures, poems, and memoirs. In reading his works, look to see how his messages of tolerance and dignity can apply to our own world. Lastly, expose yourself to the Nigerian culture, one that is vibrant, exciting, and new to many of us. Learn about Soyinka's homeland, his hopes, and his heartfelt appeals for the next generation, one that we all have an opportunity to change.

*The Wole Soyinka Project Student Advisory Board*

Paula Kweskin, Chairperson

Andrew Chan

Megan Latta

Rebekah Moan

## BIOGRAPHY OF WOLE SOYINKA

Oluwole Akinwande Soyinka (*show-ink-uh*) was born July 13, 1934 in a western Nigerian village called Ijebu Isara. His father Ayo (referred to “Essay” in Ake) was a school headmaster and his mother, deemed “Wild Christian” by the village, was a shopkeeper. His father and grandfather placed great value on education in the British-ruled society, so they supported his studies in primary and secondary education, viewing it as a way to bring honor to the family.

Soyinka grew up during the colonial and post-colonial period, experiencing a blending of the (some would say mutually exclusive) British and Yoruba cultures. His father was headmaster of the local school, devoted to his rose garden and kept close tabs on the radio news and electrical devices. His mother was an enthusiastic Christian, who took the children to church and always encouraged neighbors and villagers to convert. At the same time, village rituals and Yoruba superstitions had a powerful influence and blended with European customs.

*“Well, I was thoroughly surrounded and immersed in aspects of the Yoruba culture. Even the Christmas understood that they had come to terms with what they called “pagan” cultures. ... the estrangement was not very heavy, not too distanced...So there was this fusion, constantly, of images, And I found no contradiction between them.”*

*Wole Soyinka*

From 1952 to 1957 Soyinka was away studying at two different colleges: University College, Ibadan in Nigeria and University of Leeds in the United Kingdom, where he received an Honors Degree in English Literature. In the late 1950s he became involved in theatre, acting in and producing his own plays that confronted racism and colonial repression in Africa. He continued his work in theatre when he returned to Nigeria in 1960, winning several awards and again attacking social issues as politics, corruption, and the mass media.

Soyinka began to get into university teaching after several years in drama. From the early ‘60s onward, he would lecture in various English departments around Nigeria, and from those positions he had a new outlet to attack issues such as dictatorship and corrupt politics. During the late 60s civil war was

happening in Nigeria, with one of the more controversial issues being the secessionist leanings of Biafra. Soyinka wrote sympathetically of Biafra, and in August of 1967 he was imprisoned for two years. (Later he would publish *The Man Died*, a memoir of his time in prison and one of his most highly acclaimed works.) During his time in prison several plays of his were produced. Released in August of 1969, he began to publish volumes of poetry, as well as tour with a theatre company in the United States. Once more taking up the university lectures and fellowships, he was conferred numerous honorary degrees and doctorates from institutions all over Europe, the UK and the United States.

*“I can define in fact, can simplify the history of human society...as a constant between power and freedom. ...ultimately, really what we have is truth versus power. Truth for me is freedom, is self-destination. Power is domination, control, and therefore a very selective form of truth, which is a lie. And the polarity between these two, in fact, forms for me the axis of human striving in the creation of an ethical society, an ethical community.”*

*Wole Soyinka*

Soyinka won the Nobel Prize in literature in 1986 for his essays on the interaction of Western and African cultures. Awards kept coming in as he continued his political work, one of the foremost leaders in a movement for democracy and free speech. Power struggles in Nigeria continues, and in 1994 General Sani Abacha took power, banning all political parties and rallies. Soyinka had face harassment and silent threats from the government before and in 1994 he and several other writers and leaders had to flee Abacha's Nigeria. He continued his work (in 1997 he was charged with treason by the dictatorship), and currently holds positions at Emory University, The International Institute of letters (University of Nevada), and is a member of the Theatre Olympics Council.

*“...let's just put it this way: we have no option. That's my space and I want it back. And so I have no option but to continue to fight to get it back. I'm not surrendering that space for some bunch of thugs and murderers and torturers and rapists and robbers. It's just unthinkable. So from that standpoint, you could say that I'm an optimist in the sense that I'm confident I will take it back.”*

*Wole Soyinka*



## Wole Soyinka: A Chronology

[James Gibbs, **Critical Perspectives on Wole Soyinka** (1980), provided much of the information in the first part of the following chronology. [Adesola Adeyemi](#) has kindly provided most of the later material.]

**1934** Born Oluwole Akinwande Soyinka on 13 July in Ijebu Isara in Western Nigeria. His father Ayo was a school supervisor and his mother Eniola "a trader."

**ca. 1940-1952.** attends primary school in Abeokuta and secondary school at Government College, Ibadan.

**1952-54** University College, Ibadan, an institution affiliated with the University of London

**1954-1957** University of Leeds (UK). Receives Honors Degree in English Literature.

**1957.** Begins work for M. A. at Leeds but abandons graduate studies to work in theater; serves as play reader for Royal Court Theatre, London.

**1958.** September: Produces **The Swamp Dwellers** for the University of London Drama Festival.

**1959.** February: **The Swamp Dwellers and The Lion and the Jewel** produced in Ibadan; November: Writes, produces, and acts in a **An Evening without Decor**, a medley of his work, at the Royal Court Theatre, London; attacks racism and colonial repression in Africa in these and other works.

**1960.** Returns to Nigeria; March: **The Trials of Brother Jero** produced at Ibadan; May: Acts role of Yang Sun in **The Good Woman of Setzuan** at Ibadan; October: completes, directs, and acts in **A Dance of the Forests** with his own acting company, 1960 Masks.

**1961-64.** Directs plays by other playwrights, Ibadan; attacks political intriguing, corruption, and manipulation of mass media in **The (new) Republican** and **Before the Blackout**.

**1960-62.** Rockefeller Research Fellow; attached to English Department at the University of Ibadan studying African drama; December: "Towards a True Theatre" (essay); writes political satire on based on emergency in Western Nigeria.

**1962-1963.** Lecturer, Department of English, University of Ife

**1963** **Culture in Transition** (film)

**1964.** December: Founds, with others, the Drama Association of Nigeria.

**1965.** **The Interpreters** (novel) published in London; April: Writes and directs **Before the Blackout**, Orisun Theatre; directs **Kongi's Harvest**, Lagos; September: records **The Detainee** for BBC in London.

**1965-67.** Senior lecturer, Department of English, University of Lagos; criticizes personality cults and dictatorship in Africa.

**1966.** April: Revives **Kongi's Harvest**, Dakkar festival; June: **Trials of Brother Jero** produced, Hampstead Theatre Club, London; December: **The Lion and the Jewel**, Royal Court Theatre, London; shares John Whiting Award with Tom Stoppard.

**1967.** Head of the Department of Theater Arts, University of Ibadan; June: "The Writer in a Modern African State;" August to October 1969 imprisoned for writings sympathetic to secessionist Biafra; September: **The Lion and the Jewel** produced Accra; November: **Trials of Brother Jero** and **The Strong Breed** produced, Greenwich Mews Theatre, New York; **Idanre** and **Other Poems**.

**1968.** April: **Kongi's Harvest**, produced by Negro Ensemble Company, New York.

**1969.** February: **The Road** produced by Theatre Limited, Kampala, Uganda; **Poems from Prison**, London.

**1970.** August: Completes and directs **Madmen and Specialists** with Ibadan University Theatre Arts Company in New Haven, Connecticut (at Yale?); play tours to Harlem; directs plays by Pirandello and others; **Kongi's Harvest** (film).

**1971.** **A Shuttle in the Crypt** (poems); March: revives **Madmen and Specialists** in Ibadan; acts Patrice Lumumba in John Littlewood's French production of Conor Cruise O'Brien's **Murderous Angels**, Paris; testifies before Kazeem Enquiry on violation of students' rights.

**1972.** Publishes his prison notes, **The Man Died**, London; July: produces extracts from **A Dance of the Forests** in Paris.

**1973.** Honorary Ph. D., University of Leeds; **Season of Anomy** (novel); **Collected Plays I**; August: National Theatre, London, produces **Bacchae** of Euripides, which it commissioned.

**1973-74.** Overseas Fellow, Churchill College, Cambridge, and Visiting Professor of English, University of Sheffield; **Collected Plays II**.

**1975.** Edited **Poems of Black Africa**, London and New York; "Neo-Tarzanism: The Poetics of Pseudo-Tradition" (essay); attacks Idi Amin in **Transition**.

**1976.** **Ogun Abibiman** (poems); **Myth, Literature, and the African World**; Visiting Professor, Institute of African Studies, University of Ghana, Legon; Professor, University of Ife; September: Nairobi High School production of **A Dance of the Forests**; October: French production of **A Dance of the Forests**, Dakar, Gambia; December: produces **Death and the King's Horseman**, Ife.

**1978.** "Language as Boundary" (essay)

**1981** [Aké: The Years of Childhood](#) (autobiography); **Opera Wonyosi**, an adaptation of Brecht's **Three Penny Opera**; "The Critic and Society: Barthes, Leftocracy, and Other Mythologies" (essay).

**1982.** **Blues for the Prodigal** (film) released; "Cross Currents: The 'New African' after Cultural Encounters" (essay).

**1983** (December) **Die Still, Rev. Dr. Godspeak** (radio play); **Requiem for a Futurologist** (play) produced at Ife university; **Blues for a Prodigal** (film); "Shakespeare and the Living Dramatist" (essay); (July) - **Unlimited Liability Company** (phonograph recording).

**1984** **A Play of Giants** (play)

**1985.** **Requiem for a Futurologist** published; "Climates of Art" (Herbert Read Memorial Lecture), Institute of Contemporary Art, London.

**1986. Nobel Prize for Literature.** "The External Encounter: Ambivalence in African Arts and Literature" (essay), **A Play of Giants** (play), Fellow, Society for the Humanities, Cornell University; Agip Prize for Literature; 1986 (October); Awarded of Nigeria's second highest honour, Commander of the Federal Republic, CFR.;

**1987** **Six Plays; Childe Internationale** (play) republished.

**1989** "The Search" (short story).

**1991** Sisi Clara Workshop on Theatre (Lagos); **A Scourge of Hyacinths** (radio play) BBC African Service; "The Credo of Being and Nothingness" (The First Rev. Olufosoye Annual Lecture in Religion, delivered at the University of Ibadan on 25th January, 1991; published

**1992** **From Zia With Love**

**1993** honorary doctorate, Harvard University

**1994** **Ibadan: The Penkelemes Years (A Memoir: 1946-1965)** (autobiography); **Memories of a Nigerian Childhood**; Flees Nigeria (November).

**1995.** **The Beatification of Area Boy,**

**1996** **The Open Sore of a Continent: A Personal Narrative of the Nigerian Crisis**

**1997.** March: Charged with treason by military dictatorship.



<http://www.scholars.nus.edu.sg/landow/post/soyinka/soyinkatl.html>

## I. INTRODUCTION

**Nigeria**, republic in western Africa, with a coast along the Atlantic Ocean on the Gulf of Guinea. Most of Nigeria consists of a low plateau cut by rivers, especially the Niger and its largest tributary, the Benue. The country takes its name from its chief river. Until 1991, the capital was the largest city, Lagos, on the southwestern coast; at that time, the city of Abuja, in the country's interior, became capital.

Nigeria is by far the most populated of Africa's countries, with more than one-seventh of the continent's people. The people belong to many different ethnic groups. These groups give the country a rich culture, but they also pose major challenges to nation building. Ethnic strife has plagued Nigeria since it gained independence in 1960.

Nigeria has a federal form of government and is divided into 36 states and a federal capital territory. The country's official name is the Federal Republic of Nigeria. Lagos, along the coast, is the largest city and the country's economic and cultural center, but Abuja, a city in the interior planned and built during the 1970s and 1980s, is the capital. The government moved from Lagos to Abuja in 1991 in the hope of creating a national capital where none of the country's ethnic groups would be dominant.

Nigeria long had an agricultural economy but now depends almost entirely on the production of petroleum, which lies in large reserves below the Niger Delta. While oil wealth has financed major investments in the country's infrastructure, Nigeria remains among the world's poorest countries in terms of per capita income. Oil revenues led the government to ignore agriculture, and Nigeria must now import farm products to feed its people.

The area that is now Nigeria was home to ethnically based kingdoms and tribal communities before it became a European colony. In spite of European contact that began in the 16th century, these kingdoms and communities maintained their autonomy until the 19th century. The colonial era began in earnest in the late 19th century, when Britain consolidated its rule over Nigeria. In 1914 the British merged their northern and southern protectorates into a single state called the Colony and Protectorate of Nigeria. Nigeria became independent of British rule in 1960. After independence Nigeria experienced frequent coups and long periods of autocratic military rule between 1966 and 1999, when a democratic civilian government was established.

## Nigeria



[http://encarta.msn.com/encyclopedia\\_761557915/nigeria.html](http://encarta.msn.com/encyclopedia_761557915/nigeria.html)



*all human rights for all*  
FIFTIETH ANNIVERSARY OF THE UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS  
**1948-1998**

Universal Declaration of Human Rights

[\(other language versions\)](#)

*Adopted and proclaimed by General Assembly resolution 217 A (III) of 10 December 1948*

**On December 10, 1948 the General Assembly of the United Nations adopted and proclaimed the Universal Declaration of Human Rights the full text of which appears in the following pages. Following this historic act the Assembly called upon all Member countries to publicize the text of the Declaration and "to cause it to be disseminated, displayed, read and expounded principally in schools and other educational institutions, without distinction based on the political status of countries or territories."**

***PREAMBLE***

Whereas recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world,

Whereas disregard and contempt for human rights have resulted in barbarous acts which have outraged the conscience of mankind, and the advent of a world in which human beings shall enjoy freedom of speech and belief and freedom from fear and want has been proclaimed as the highest aspiration of the common people,

Whereas it is essential, if man is not to be compelled to have recourse, as a last resort, to rebellion against tyranny and oppression, that human rights should be protected by the rule of law,

Whereas it is essential to promote the development of friendly relations between nations,

Whereas the peoples of the United Nations have in the Charter reaffirmed their faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person and in the equal rights of men and women and have determined to promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom,

Whereas Member States have pledged themselves to achieve, in co-operation with the United Nations, the promotion of universal respect for and observance of human rights and fundamental freedoms,

Whereas a common understanding of these rights and freedoms is of the greatest importance for the full realization of this pledge,

**Now, Therefore THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY proclaims THIS UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS** as a common standard of achievement for all peoples and

all nations, to the end that every individual and every organ of society, keeping this Declaration constantly in mind, shall strive by teaching and education to promote respect for these rights and freedoms and by progressive measures, national and international, to secure their universal and effective recognition and observance, both among the peoples of Member States themselves and among the peoples of territories under their jurisdiction.

***Article 1.***

All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.

***Article 2.***

Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status. Furthermore, no distinction shall be made on the basis of the political, jurisdictional or international status of the country or territory to which a person belongs, whether it be independent, trust, non-self-governing or under any other limitation of sovereignty.

***Article 3.***

Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person.

***Article 4.***

No one shall be held in slavery or servitude; slavery and the slave trade shall be prohibited in all their forms.

***Article 5.***

No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.

***Article 6.***

Everyone has the right to recognition everywhere as a person before the law.

***Article 7.***

All are equal before the law and are entitled without any discrimination to equal protection of the law. All are entitled to equal protection against any discrimination in violation of this Declaration and against any incitement to such discrimination.

***Article 8.***

Everyone has the right to an effective remedy by the competent national tribunals for acts violating the fundamental rights granted him by the constitution or by law.

***Article 9.***

No one shall be subjected to arbitrary arrest, detention or exile.

***Article 10.***

Everyone is entitled in full equality to a fair and public hearing by an independent and impartial tribunal, in the determination of his rights and obligations and of any criminal charge against him.

***Article 11.***

(1) Everyone charged with a penal offence has the right to be presumed innocent until proved guilty according to law in a public trial at which he has had all the guarantees necessary for his defence.

(2) No one shall be held guilty of any penal offence on account of any act or omission which did not constitute a penal offence, under national or international law, at the time when it was committed. Nor shall a heavier penalty be imposed than the one that was applicable at the time the penal offence was committed.

***Article 12.***

No one shall be subjected to arbitrary interference with his privacy, family, home or correspondence, nor to attacks upon his honour and reputation. Everyone has the right to the protection of the law against such interference or attacks.

***Article 13.***

(1) Everyone has the right to freedom of movement and residence within the borders of each state.

(2) Everyone has the right to leave any country, including his own, and to return to his country.

***Article 14.***

(1) Everyone has the right to seek and to enjoy in other countries asylum from persecution.

(2) This right may not be invoked in the case of prosecutions genuinely arising from non-political crimes or from acts contrary to the purposes and principles of the United Nations.

***Article 15.***

(1) Everyone has the right to a nationality.

(2) No one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his nationality nor denied the right to change his nationality.

***Article 16.***

(1) Men and women of full age, without any limitation due to race, nationality or religion, have the right to marry and to found a family. They are entitled to equal rights as to marriage, during marriage and at its dissolution.

(2) Marriage shall be entered into only with the free and full consent of the intending spouses.

(3) The family is the natural and fundamental group unit of society and is entitled to protection by society and the State.

***Article 17.***

(1) Everyone has the right to own property alone as well as in association with others.

(2) No one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his property.

***Article 18.***

Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance.

***Article 19.***

Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.

***Article 20.***

(1) Everyone has the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and association.

(2) No one may be compelled to belong to an association.

***Article 21.***

(1) Everyone has the right to take part in the government of his country, directly or through freely chosen representatives.

(2) Everyone has the right of equal access to public service in his country.

(3) The will of the people shall be the basis of the authority of government; this will shall be expressed in periodic and genuine elections which shall be by universal and equal suffrage and shall be held by secret vote or by equivalent free voting procedures.

***Article 22.***

Everyone, as a member of society, has the right to social security and is entitled to realization, through national effort and international co-operation and in accordance with the organization and resources of each State, of the economic, social and cultural rights indispensable for his dignity and the free development of his personality.

***Article 23.***

(1) Everyone has the right to work, to free choice of employment, to just and favourable conditions of work and to protection against unemployment.

(2) Everyone, without any discrimination, has the right to equal pay for equal work.

(3) Everyone who works has the right to just and favourable remuneration ensuring for himself and his family an existence worthy of human dignity, and supplemented, if necessary, by other means of social protection.

(4) Everyone has the right to form and to join trade unions for the protection of his interests.

***Article 24.***

Everyone has the right to rest and leisure, including reasonable limitation of working hours and periodic holidays with pay.

***Article 25.***

(1) Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control.

(2) Motherhood and childhood are entitled to special care and assistance. All children, whether born in or out of wedlock, shall enjoy the same social protection.

***Article 26.***

(1) Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be compulsory. Technical and professional education shall be made generally available and higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit.

(2) Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups, and shall further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace.

(3) Parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children.

***Article 27.***

(1) Everyone has the right freely to participate in the cultural life of the community, to enjoy the arts and to share in scientific advancement and its benefits.

(2) Everyone has the right to the protection of the moral and material interests resulting from any scientific, literary or artistic production of which he is the author.

***Article 28.***

Everyone is entitled to a social and international order in which the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration can be fully realized.

***Article 29.***

(1) Everyone has duties to the community in which alone the free and full development of his personality is possible.

(2) In the exercise of his rights and freedoms, everyone shall be subject only to such limitations as are determined by law solely for the purpose of securing due recognition and respect for the rights and freedoms of others and of meeting the just requirements of morality, public order and the general welfare in a democratic society.

(3) These rights and freedoms may in no case be exercised contrary to the purposes and principles of the United Nations.

***Article 30.***

Nothing in this Declaration may be interpreted as implying for any State, group or person any right to engage in any activity or to perform any act aimed at the destruction of any of the rights and freedoms set forth herein.

## **Discussion Questions on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights**

1. Why is this Declaration so important?
2. Can you give an example of where these rights are being violated?
3. What should be done with people who violate these rights?
4. How do we enforce these rights? When is a government responsible for a violation? Who enforces these rights?

## WORKS OF WOLE SOYINKA

### DRAMA

*Death and the King's Horsemen*  
*The Strong Breed*  
*The Lion and the Jewel*  
*A Dance of the Forests*  
*The Road*  
*A Play of Giants*  
*From Zia with Love*  
*Beautification of Area Bay*

Adaptations: *The Bacchae of Euripides*  
*Opera Wonyosi (Brecht's Threepenny Opera)*  
*King Baabu (Alfred Jerry's Ubu Roi)*

### POEMS (collections)

*Idanre and Other Poems*  
*A Shuttle in the Crypt*  
*Ogun Abibman*  
*Mandela's Earth and Other Poems*

### ESSAYS (collections)

*Myth, Literature and the African World*  
*Art, Dialogue and Outrage*  
*Continuity and America*  
*The Open Sore of a Continent: The Burden of Memory and the Muse of Forgiveness*

### PROSE

*The Man Died: Prison Notes of Wole Soyinka*  
*Ake: The Years of Childhood*  
*Ibadan: The Penkelemes Years (A Memoir 1946-1965)*  
*Memories of a Nigerian Childhood*  
*Season of Anomy (a novel)*  
*ISARA: A Voyage Around "Essay"*

# WOLE SOYINKA'S GIFT TO THE WORLD

Author: Date: Sunday, October 26, 1986  
Page: B3  
Section: FOCUS

When Wole Soyinka, the 52-year-old Nigerian writer who was recently awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature, was jailed and later exiled for his involvement with Biafran secessionists in the 1960s, the result was a powerful nonfiction book, "The Man Who Died." His 20 books in print include poetry, plays, his memoir, "Ake: The Years of Childhood," and several novels. The Nobel announcement characterized him thus: "He has his roots in the Yoruba people's myths, rites and cultural patterns, which their turn have historical links to the Mediterranean region. Through his education in his native land and in Europe he has also acquired deep familiarity with Western culture. His collection of essays, 'Myths, Literature and the African World' make for clarifying and enriching reading."

Some excerpts from his works:

"The sprawling, undulating terrain is all of Ake. More than mere loyalty to the parsonage gave birth to a puzzle, and a resentment, that God should choose to look down on his own pious station, the parsonage compound, from the profane heights of Itoko...."

On a misty day, the steep rise towards Itoko would join the sky. If God did not actually live there, there was little doubt that he descended first on its crest, then took his one gigantic stride over those babbling markets—which dared to sell on Sundays—into St. Peter's Church, afterwards visiting the parsonage for tea with the Canon. There was the small consolation that, in spite of the temptation to arrive on horseback, he never stopped at fist at the Chief's who was known to be a pagan; certainly the Chief was never seen at a church service except at the anniversaries of the Alake's coronation. Instead God strode straight into St. Peter's for morning service, paused briefly at the afternoon service, which, in his honour, was always held in English tongue...."

From "Ake: The Years of Childhood," by Wole Soyinka, Random House © 1981.

"I made a strange discovery this morning. I am pregnant.

For a long time I looked down on the evidence, wondering how it came to be. For there it was, firmly rounded and taut, an egg of a

protuberance that had no business at all on my waist-line.

Considering my sex, it should not happen at all. Of course, stranger things have been known to happen, Sex change could creep up slowly on a man, unnoticed is such an asexual atmosphere....

Could it be kwasi-okor?

No. The pictures of kwashi-okor I have seen are huge calabashes which commence from the region of the lower chest, balloon evenly outwards then—a sharp ingress towards the scrotum. My pregnancy begins just below the navel, it is hard as stone, small and compact...It is contradictory because the rest of my body id skin and bone—this is the fifth week of the new cycle of fasting....

I resolve to take a walk and ponder the strange phenomenon of my body. The act of getting up solved it at once. I caught myself automatically expanding my belly to fill the huge gap in my trousers. The longer I fasted, the wider the gap of course and the harder my lower belly strained to fill it. I seem to have built up over the months what must be in proportion to the body the largest abdominal set of muscles anywhere in the world...here under the navel was bunched a wad of rich, superabundant muscles, ready to step into any Mr. Universe contest of the abdomen.”

From “The Man Died: Prison Notes of Wole Soyinka,” by Wole Soyinka, Harper and Row © 1972.

“...on the second last visit to the hospital it rained. The deluge was a strange unreal awakening. I had forgotten wind and flood as denizens of open spaces. This was clean spring water, energized in endless cosmos, not mere cold venom from an iron-ringed hole in the sky. Until now I had locked out all intrusion of this new extended space into the mind, branding it alien and dangerous, inimical to the future that lay after the brief excursion into a simulated liberty....

Until the rains crashed through the barrier of insulation. An exhilarating storm, it penetrated all defences physical and mental, crushed the capsule to release the wild sweet scent of liberty. I gave into it, turning to the strength of a thousand combative resolves that rushed out one after the other...It had to do with liberty but not with the gaining of it. It was a passionate affirmation of the free spirit, a knowledge that because of this love, my adversaries had lost the conflict. That it did not matter in the end for ho long they manoeuvred to keep my body behind the walls, they would not, ultimately, escape the fate of the defeated. At the hands of all who are allied and committed to the

unfettered principles of life.”

From “The Man Died: Prison Notes of Wole Soyinka,” by Wole Soyinka, Harper and Row © 1972.

“There were a few who escaped the first whirlpool of blood. They were sucked gratefully into the next, a quiet limbo of the mind where nothing happened and time stood still. The youth who walked as if eternally trapped in the tunnel spikes...anything was welcome with the weight of fear behind. They impaled themselves on the broken-glass tops of the walls and battered the metal-studded gates. A mother took her child by the legs and swung it over the walls. It fell short, was hooked in the fanged tunnel. It lacked the sense to lay still. Last vision of the mother before the mob got her...the soft flesh of the child and the metal barbs sinking deeper.”

From “Season of Anomy,” by Wole Soyinka, The Third Press, Joseph Okpaku Publishing Company, Inc., 1974.

## BRINGER OF PEACE

You come as light rain not quench  
But question out the pride of fire  
Watchlight to my peace, within and out  
Unguarded moments and the human hours.

You come as light rain, swift to soothe  
The rent in earth with deft intrusion  
To test your peace on a hiss of ashes  
Your sky of lakes on thrists of embers

Yet fires hold the best at bay  
Inclose, with all accomplishments of rage  
The inborn bowl, proud lacerations  
Futile vaults at high bounds of the pit

This cunning sift of mild aggression, then  
Is your rain a tacit lie of stillness  
A smile to test the python's throes, a touch  
To bring the bowstring's nerve to rest.

### **Discussion Questions on "Bringer of Peace"**

1. Who is the "You" Soyinka refers to? Who is this person?
2. Give an example of a resounding metaphor.
3. What is being soothed in this poem?
4. What is this poem about? Do you agree or disagree with its message? Why?

## HER JOY IS WILD

Her joy is wild, wild  
Wave-breaking she proclaims,  
Your strong teeth will weaken  
If you nibble the rind.

Her strength is wild, wild  
Wild as the love that sings –  
This is the last-born; give me  
A joyful womb to bind.

The hour is wild, wild  
Denies the wispy moments. Yet  
When the fist is loosened, when  
The know is cut, you'll find

Skins of hair. Wild, wild  
Her laughter, dreaming that the tribe  
Had slain the senile chieftain  
That the rite – was kind.

Her words are wild, wild  
Shell the future, place the nut  
Between my teeth – and I denied her  
Nothing, maimed on her vision of the blind.

### **Discussion Questions on “Her Joy is Wild”**

1. What does the last stanza mean?
2. What is Soyinka referring to when he writes, “Yet/When the fist is loosened, when/The know is cut, you’ll find/Skins of hair?”
3. What is this poem about? Do you see any significance in it?

## LUO PLAINS

Kenya

Plague

Of comet tails, of bled horizons  
Where egrets hone a sky-lane for  
Worlds to turn on pennants

Lakemists

On her shadeless dugs, parched  
At waterhole. Veils. Molten silver  
Down cloudflues of alchemist sun...  
A lake's grey salve at dawn?

That dawn

Her eyes were tipped with sunset spears  
Seasons' quills upon her parchment, yet  
The hidden lake of her

Forgives!

For she has milked a cycle of  
Red Sunset spears, sucked reeds of poison  
To a cowherd's flute. The plains  
Are swift again on migrant wings  
And the cactus  
Flowers the eagle sentinel.

Forgives!

For she has milked a cycle of  
Red Sunset spears, sucked reeds of poison  
To a cowherd's flute. The plains  
Are swift again on migrant wings  
And the cactus  
Flowers the eagle sentinel.

### Discussion Questions on "Luo Plains"

1. What does the poem mean?
2. What is Soyinka referring to? What is the poem discussing?
3. What is the most powerful imagery for you?
4. What is significant about the question mark in the poem?

## **AKÉ: THE YEARS OF CHILDHOOD**

*This autobiography by Wole Soyinka (published 1981) covers the years preceding and including World War II. One of the most important themes of the book is the interaction between the British culture and the native Yoruba near the end of the colonial period. The following passage takes place when Mrs. Kuti, one of the leaders of Women's Rebellion, is speaking to a British official about the bombing of Japan at the end of WWII.*

'Let me tell you Mr. District Officer, we are not impressed. We are by no means impressed, no, not surprised either. I knew it was coming and when I heard it on the radio all I could think was, just like them, just like the white race. You had to drop it on Japan, didn't you? Why couldn't you drop it on Germany? Tell me that. Answer my question honestly if you can- why not Germany?'

There was a pause while she listened to what the other speaker had to reply.

She laughed, a dry, bitter sound. "I give you credit for intelligence, but not for honesty. That was merely a clever answer, it was not honest. You know bloody well why. Because Germany is a white race, the Germans are your kinsmen while the Japanese are just dirty yellow people. Yes, that is *right*, that is the truth, don't deny it! You dropped that inhuman weapon on human beings, on densely populated cities...'

'...I know you, the white mentality: Japanese, Chinese, Africans, we are all subhuman. You would drop an atom bomb on Abeokuta or any of your colonies if it suited you!'

'The white man is a racist,' she said. 'You know you history of the slave trade, well, to him the black man is only a beast of burden, a work-donkey. As for the Asians- and that includes the Indians, Japanese, Chinese and so on, they are only a small grade above us. So, dropping that terrible weapon, experimenting with such a horrifying thing on human beings-as long as they are not white-is for them the same as experimenting on cattle.'

*[At this point Daodu, Mrs. Kuti's husband, has entered and hears the conversation. Wole Soyinka is about to go for entrance examinations to the Government School to continue his education, something that has prompted discussion with him and Daodu before. Daodu begins to speak to Wole.]*

'I would never send Koye or any of his brothers to a school run by white men. But you must also understand this, it is not merely because they are white, it is also because they are colonizers. They try to destroy character in our boys...'

He turned Beere. 'Do you know what I found out? Those teachers don't allow pockets in their shorts!'

Beere was clearly startled. 'Is that true?' she asked me.

I confirmed it.

'Now why do you think they do that? Why on earth should a young man not have pockets in his shorts? You know,' he shook his head in a really worried manner, 'the white man is a strange creature. In his country, in his own schools-and remember, I visited a number of public schools during out conference-Eton, Harrow, etc.- well, their boarders wear suits, all with pockets...- why should one of them come here as a principal and forbid pockets in the shorts of the GC boys? I had some ideas on the matter but first I had some good news to give him.

'We learnt that Powell will be leaving shortly. He's retiring. The new principal may let us have pockets.'

Daodu turned to his wife and explained, 'Powell is the present principal. A very keen Boy Scout. A-ha! Now that is an even greater indictment, A boy scout needs as many pockets as he can use. Have you ever seen a boy scout?'

'Well, I was a cub at St. Peter's. We had a teacher who was a keen scoutmaster.' ...

Daodu nodded approvingly. 'Now scouting also develops character. It would be interesting to see of this scouting enthusiast, who does not provide pockets for his schoolboys, at least encourages scouting in the school.'

I was able to fulfill his worst fears- GCI had no scouting programme. At my previous interview, I had marked down Scouting in that section of the questionnaire which required us to state our hobbies. One of the white faces who sat on the panel had smiled and regretted that there was no scouting in the school. When I passed this information to Daodu, he raised his arms in genuine concern, looking at me with something akin to commiseration. ...

'He is always posing at the head of the national scout jamborees with his scout uniform stuck all over with labels and decorations. So, there we have the keen scoutmaster, yet he does not encourage scouting at his school.' He pursed his lips and looked me up and down as if I was walking into some mortal danger. Even Beere seemed to be equally infected by the sudden pessimistic outlook on my future. She commented:

'Double standards of course. It's just what I was telling that District Officer before you came in-dropping that atom bomb over Hiroshima but not over white Germany. There is a racist in every white man.'

Reverend Kuti sighed. His countenance was really doleful and I began to wonder if I had not made a mistake in wanting to go to Government College. Then he brightened up somewhat, asking, 'You are now what? How old, how old?'

'Eleven,' I replied

'Mm...well, that's not too bad. You'll be eleven and a half when you join in January. And you've had two years as Grammarian...that ought to have done it I think. Don't you think so?' turning to Beere for confirmation.

'Oh yes, yes,' she assured him. 'Not forgetting the fact that he's been brought up by Ayo and Eniola. I think he'll be able to cope with them over there.'

Daodu nodded. He was visibly cheering up, and he gave a defiant snort. 'Yes, we'll see. An ex-public school master who sews up his students' pockets and makes them say Sir-Sir-Sir like slaves. A scoutmaster who discourages scouting. Mostly ceremonial caning- I doubt if any pupil from that school has ever taken home a single scar on his back! How on earth do they hope to train our biys properly that way?' [Ake: *The Years of Childhood* pp. 223-224, 227-230]

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1: In the part above the excerpt dealing with the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Mrs. Kuti claims that the reason the Allies bombed Japan and not Germany is because the Germans were fellow whites and the Japanese were "subhuman". Does she have a valid point?

2: Daodu is concerned about Wole Soyinka losing his identity and ethnic tradition in a school run by white men, with rules and practices so different from the Yoruba culture. Throughout the book Soyinka has dealt with a mixing of the two cultures; his mother is Christian, his father is the head of the local school. His grandfather has given him a ritual tattoo on his wrists and ankles, he has spent time on one his cousin's farms and trekking through the woods in the traditional African way. Knowing what you do about Soyinka's work, should Daodu have been concerned?

3: Mrs. Kuti and Daodu's generalizations of the white men come from experience, and one can sympathize with them. But are their beliefs any more justified or morally right than the views of the Europeans?

# Political Nigeria, Past and Present

**C Colonial Expansion** Compared with other parts of West Africa, Nigeria was slow to feel the penetration of Europe. Unlike in Ghana and Senegal, no European fortifications were built along the coast, and Europeans—mostly British—came ashore only briefly to trade weapons, alcohol, and other goods in return for slaves. It is not clear what portion of the vast number of slaves taken from West Africa (estimates range from about 10 to 30 million) came from Nigeria.

In 1807 Britain abolished the slave trade and enlisted other European nations to enforce the ban. Britain's motivations were partly humanitarian—there was a reform movement at home—and partly economic: The British Empire no longer had American colonies whose economic growth depended on slaves, and moreover the rise of industrialization meant Britain needed Africa's raw materials more than its people. Consequently, trade in products such as palm oil, which Europeans valued highly as an industrial lubricant, replaced the trade in humans. Most of Nigeria's former slave-trading states were weakened by the loss of income. A few managed to continue a much-reduced contraband slave trade until the 1860s. Others used slave labor to farm plantations of oil palm.

British trading companies such as the United Africa Company took advantage of the weakened empires and established depots at Lagos and in the Niger Delta. Meanwhile, explorers such as Mungo Park and Hugh Clapperton of Scotland, John and Richard Lander of England, and Heinrich Barth of Germany charted the Niger River and its surroundings. The explorers, some of them funded by trading companies, laid the groundwork for the eventual expansion inland of the trading companies. Missionaries also facilitated the process of replacing the noxious slave trade with "Christian commerce." Some inland peoples took advantage of new opportunities to produce goods for the Europeans, but most resisted and were forcibly subjugated.

**C1 The Scramble for Africa** In 1884 and 1885 European powers carved Africa into spheres of influence at the Berlin West Africa Conference. Britain, its claim to Nigeria affirmed, moved quickly to consolidate its territory. The colony of Lagos, first declared in 1861, was expanded, and in 1887 a new protectorate, Oil Rivers (later the Niger Coast Protectorate), was created in the Niger Delta. The British also waged bloody and ruthless war on resisting coastal and forest peoples, particularly in Benin, Nupe, and Ilorin. Its hold in the south was secure by 1897.

While Britain was consolidating these areas, it granted the Royal Niger Company a trading monopoly in the north. In return the company agreed to advance British interests, economic and political. The company set up headquarters at Lokoja, located at the confluence of the Niger and Benue rivers in central Nigeria, and extended its trade northwest up the Niger and northeast up the Benue. Treaties were signed with several African states, including Nupe, Sokoto, and Gwandu, thus depriving French and German rivals access to the northern region.

In 1900, with the south secure, Britain revoked the Royal Niger Company's charter and declared that a colonial government would administer Nigeria as two protectorates: one in the south and one in the north. (Lagos was incorporated into the southern protectorate in 1906.) Simultaneously, Britain went to war against the Sokoto caliphate in the northwest, conquering it by 1903. Remaining pockets of resistance within the caliphate and elsewhere in northern

Nigeria were quelled over the next few years. In 1914 Britain joined the two protectorates into a single colony, and in 1922 part of the former German colony of Kamerun was attached to Nigeria as a League of Nations-mandated territory.

**C2 Indirect Rule** Britain governed Nigeria via indirect rule, a system in which native leaders continued to rule their traditional lands so long as they collected taxes and performed other duties ensuring British prosperity. Uncooperative or ineffective leaders were easily replaced by others who were more compliant or competent, and usually more than willing to enjoy the perks of government. Britain was thus saved the huge economic and political cost of running and militarily securing a day-to-day government.

Indirect rule operated relatively smoothly in the north, where the British worked with the Fulani aristocracy, who had long governed the Sokoto caliphate and who were able to administer traditional Islamic law alongside British civil law. In the south, however, traditions were less accommodating. In Yorubaland indirect rule disrupted historical checks and balances, increasing the power of some chiefs at the expense of others. Moreover, although the Yoruba kings had long been powerful, few had collected taxes, and citizens resisted their right to do so under British mandate. In the southeast, particularly in Igboland, many of the societies had never had chiefs or for that matter organized states. Consequently, the chiefs appointed by Britain received little or no respect. In Nigeria's culturally fragmented middle belt, small groups were forcefully incorporated into larger political units and often ruled by "foreign" Fulani, who brought with them alien institutions such as Islamic law.

The British carried out a few reforms, including the gradual elimination of domestic slavery, which had been a central feature of the Sokoto caliphate. They also provided Western education for some of Nigeria's elite; however, in the main Britain limited schooling as much as feasible.

Britain redirected almost all of Nigeria's trade away from Africa and toward itself, a move that undermined the northern region's large, centuries-old trade across the Sahara. Britain further changed the economy by introducing new crops and expanding old ones, such as oil palm, cotton, groundnuts, and cacao, almost all of which were sold for export. Iron and tin were also mined, and railroads were built to transport products. Because Britain required Nigerians to pay taxes in cash rather than goods, most Nigerians had little choice but to grow cash-yielding export crops or to migrate seasonally to areas where paying jobs could be found.

**C3 Opposition to the British** Throughout the early 20th century, Nigerians found many ways to oppose foreign rule. Local armed revolts, concentrated in the middle belt, broke out sporadically and intensified during World War I (1914-1918). Workers in mines, railways, and public service often went on strike over poor wages and working conditions, including a large general action in 1945, when 30,000 workers stopped commerce for 37 days. Ire over taxation prompted other conflicts, including a battle in 1929 fought mainly by Igbo women in the Aba area. More common was passive resistance: avoiding being counted in the census, working at a slow pace, telling stories ridiculing colonists and colonialism. A few political groups also formed to campaign for independence, including the National Congress and the National Democratic Party, but their success was slight. In 1937 the growing movement was given a voice by Nnamdi Azikiwe, an Igbo nationalist, who founded the newspaper *West African Pilot*.

World War II (1939-1945), in which many Nigerians fought for or otherwise aided Britain, increased the pace of nationalism. The growing anticolonial feeling was most strongly

articulated by two groups, the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons (NCNC), led by Azikiwe and supported mostly by Igbo and other easterners, and the Action Group, led by activist Obafemi Awolowo and supported mostly by Yoruba and other westerners. By the early 1950s, other parties had emerged, notably the Northern People's Congress, a conservative northern group led by the Hausa-Fulani elite. The regional power bases of these parties foreshadowed the divisive regional politics that would follow colonialism.

Pressure for independence from within Nigeria was complemented by pressure from other nations, and from reformers in Britain and in other colonies. In 1947 the British responded by introducing a new constitution that divided Nigeria into three regions: the Northern Region, the Eastern Region, and the Western Region. The Northern Region was mainly Hausa-Fulani and Muslim; the Eastern Region, Igbo and Catholic; and the Western Region, Yoruba and mixed Muslim and Anglican. The regions each had their own legislative assemblies, with mainly appointed rather than elected members, and were overseen by a weak federal government. Although short-lived, the constitution had serious long-term impact through its encouragement of regional, ethnic-based politics.

The constitution failed on several counts, was abrogated in 1949, and was followed by other constitutions in 1951 and 1954, each of which had to contend with powerful ethnic forces. The Northern People's Congress (NPC) argued that northerners, who made up half of Nigeria's population, should have a large degree of autonomy from other regions and a large representation in any federal legislature. The NPC was especially concerned about respect for Islam and the economic dominance of the south. The western-based Action Group also wanted autonomy; they feared that their profitable western cocoa industries would be tapped to subsidize less wealthy areas. In the poorer east, the National Council for Nigeria and the Cameroons wanted a powerful central government and a redistribution of wealth—the very things feared by the Action Group.

The eventual compromise was the 1954 constitution, which made Nigeria a federation of three regions corresponding to the major ethnic nations. It differed from the 1947 constitution in that powers were more evenly split between the regional governments and the central government. The constitution also gave the regions the right to seek self-government, which the Western and Eastern regions achieved in 1956. The Northern Region, however, fearing that self-government (and thus British withdrawal) would leave it at the mercy of southerners, delayed the imposition until 1959.

In December 1959, elections were held for a federal parliament. None of the three main parties won a majority, but the NPC, thanks to the size of the Northern Region, won the largest plurality. Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, head of the NPC, entered a coalition government with the eastern NCNC as prime minister. The new parliament was seated in January 1960.

**D Independence** Nigeria became independent on October 1, 1960. In 1961 the Cameroons trust territories were split in two. The mostly Muslim northern Cameroons voted to become part of the Northern Region of Nigeria, while the southern Cameroons joined the Federal Republic of Cameroon.

Regional and ethnic tensions escalated quickly. The censuses of 1962 and 1963 fueled bitter disputes, as did the trial and imprisonment of leading opposition politicians, whom Prime Minister Balewa accused dubiously of treason. In 1963 an eastern section of the Western Region that was ethnically non-Yoruba was split off into a new region, the Midwestern Region.

Matters deteriorated during the violence-marred elections of 1964, from which the NPC emerged victorious. On January 15, 1966, junior army officers revolted and killed Balewa and several other politicians, including the prime ministers of the Northern and Western regions. Major General Johnson Aguiyi-Ironsi, the commander of the army and an Igbo, emerged as the country's new leader.

Ironsi immediately suspended the constitution, which did little to ease northern fears of southern domination. In late May 1966 Ironsi further angered the north with the announcement that many public services then controlled by the regions would henceforth be controlled by the federal government. On July 29 northern-backed army officers staged a counter coup, assassinating Ironsi and replacing him with Lieutenant Colonel Yakubu Gowon. The coup was followed by the massacre of thousands of Igbo in northern cities. Most of the surviving Igbo sought refuge in their crowded eastern homelands.

**D1 Civil War** In May 1967 Gowon announced the creation of a new 12-state structure. The Eastern Region, populated mostly by Igbo, would be divided into three states, two of them dominated by non-Igbo groups. The division would also sever the vast majority of Igbo from profitable coastal ports and rich oil fields that had recently been discovered in the Niger Delta (which until then was a part of the Eastern Region). The leaders of the Eastern Region, pushed to the brink of secession by the recent anti-Igbo attacks and the influx of Igbo refugees, saw this action as an official attempt to push the Igbo to the margins of Nigerian society and politics. On May 27, 1967, the region's Igbo-dominated assembly authorized Lieutenant Colonel Odemegwu Ojukwu to declare independence as the Republic of Biafra. Ojukwu obliged three days later.

War broke out in July 1967 when Nigerian forces moved south and captured the university town of Nsukka. Biafran troops crossed the Niger River, pushing deep into the west in an attempt to attack Lagos, then the capital. Gowon's forces repelled the invasion, imposed a naval blockade of the southeastern coast, and mounted a counterattack into northern Biafra. A bitter war of attrition followed, prolonged by France's military support for the Biafrans. In January 1970 the better-equipped federal forces finally overcame the rebels, whereupon Gowon announced he would remain in power for six more years to ensure a peaceful transition to democracy.

[http://encarta.msn.com/encyclopedia\\_761557915\\_12/Nigeria.html](http://encarta.msn.com/encyclopedia_761557915_12/Nigeria.html)

# **NIGERIA**

## Human rights defenders under attack

Many Nigerians who have had the courage to stand up for the human rights of their fellow citizens have paid a heavy price. Some are dead: they have been executed after unfair trials or murdered, it is widely feared, by government agents. Others are imprisoned in harsh conditions, denied the support of families and lawyers, their lives and health at risk from malnutrition and medical neglect. Many of these prisoners are held in solitary confinement and denied even reading or writing materials. Some have been convicted after unfair trials by special tribunals hand-picked by the government. Others have been detained for long periods without charge or trial. Still other human rights activists have been beaten, harassed and threatened.

Human rights defenders seek to protect a broad spectrum of human rights. They work for social, economic, trade union, minority, environmental and women's rights, as well as the civil and political rights on which Amnesty International focuses. Their defence of human rights puts them at particular risk because it exposes government repression and reveals as a sham the Nigerian governments formal commitment to international human rights treaties.

The military government in Nigeria continues to repress human rights defenders, calling into question its declared intention to respect human rights and restore democracy. Although some individuals have been released, key political opponents and critics of the government remain in prison, and there have been no substantial reforms to prevent arbitrary detention and unfair political trials in the future.

Chief Moshood Abiola, the winner of the June 1993 presidential elections, has been imprisoned on treason charges for more than two years. The then military government annulled the election results and in November 1993 a coup brought another military government led by General Sani Abacha to power. Moshood Abiola and several other political leaders were arrested in June 1994 when he and other politicians who called for the military government to stand down were arrested and charged with treason, leading to Nigeria's most serious political and human rights crisis in decades. Ayo Opadokun, National Secretary of the National Democratic Coalition (nadeco), a pro-democracy group led by former government officials and politicians, has been detained without charge or trial since October 1994. Although political activity is now theoretically legal, in practice politicians who criticize the government's transition program to civilian rule have been harassed and imprisoned. Some have been forced into exile.

Other human rights defenders and critics of the government have been killed. Writer Ken Saro-Wiwa and eight other supporters of the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (**mosop**) were executed on 10 November 1995 after unfair and politically motivated murder trials. The trials, by a Civil Disturbances Special Tribunal, targeted the leadership of **mosop** in order to undermine its grassroots campaign for political, economic and environmental rights for the Ogoni minority in Rivers State, southeast Nigeria.

Amnesty International fears that recent attacks on opposition leaders and human rights defenders may have been carried out by government agents acting with or without the knowledge of the central authorities. Kudirat Abiola, senior wife of Moshood Abiola, was assassinated on 4 June 1996. She had been outspoken in her support for her husband and the government made no attempt to allay suspicion by setting up an independent investigation into her murder. Instead, the police detained a number of Moshood Abiola's relatives for several weeks without charge and, on 17 June, arrested four senior members of nadeco. Most of Moshood Abiola's relatives were released by late July 1996 but the nadeco leaders remained in detention without charge or trial.

Other attacks where government involvement has been suspected include that on Chief Alfred Rewane, a leading member and financial backer of nadeco, who was shot dead by gunmen at his home in October 1995. In February 1996 Alex Ibru, publisher of the liberal Guardian newspaper, was shot and seriously wounded. A previously unknown group claimed it had shot him to protect the interests of the government.

At least 19 Ogoni detainees, mostly **mosop** supporters, are due to be tried by another government-appointed Civil Disturbances Special Tribunal. They are charged with the murder of four Ogoni leaders in May 1994, the same charges used to execute the Ogoni nine. They have been detained incommunicado and in life-threatening conditions, most since mid-1994. One detainee, Clement Tusima, died in custody in August 1995, apparently from medical neglect compounded by harsh prison conditions and malnutrition. Others are said to be emaciated and seriously ill, including one who has reportedly lost his sight. Most of the 19 have been held on a "holding charge" for two years but have still not been brought before any court higher than a magistrate's court. In July and August 1996, in their first court appearances in a year, they appealed to be tried or released; the application was referred to the High Court. On 6 August two of their defence lawyers were arrested in court and charged with obstructing the police.

On 4 January 1996 the Internal Security Task Force, the joint military/police force which has controlled Ogoniland since April 1994, reportedly arrested, assaulted and fired at demonstrators commemorating Ogoni Day. In March and April 1996 hundreds of Ogoni refugees fled to neighbouring Benin, until the Nigerian government increased security at the border. Anyakwee Nsirimovu, head of the Institute of Human Rights and Humanitarian Law in Port Harcourt, **mosop** supporters and the elderly parents of Ken Saro-Wiwa were reportedly arrested to prevent them meeting a UN team which visited Ogoniland in April 1996. The authorities denied reports of further arrests in August before a proposed visit by Commonwealth Foreign Ministers.

No independent or judicial inquiry was carried out into allegations that the security forces had killed at least two demonstrators on 4 January 1996, just as none has ever been instituted by the authorities into reported extrajudicial executions by government forces in 1993 and 1994 in Ogoniland.

Political prisoners have been victims of flagrantly unfair political trials by special courts. In all, 43 people, including human rights defenders and armed forces officers, were convicted of treason and related offences in secret trials by a Special Military Tribunal in 1995.<sup>1</sup> They were charged with involvement in a coup plot or being "accessories after the fact to treason", and

most were sentenced to death (later commuted) or long prison terms. However, the alleged plot appears to have been fabricated as a pretext to imprison key critics of the government, including retired General Olusegun Obasanjo, head of state from 1976 to 1979, and his former deputy head of state, retired Major-General Shehu Musa Yar'Adua. The only Nigerian military rulers to have voluntarily handed over power to a civilian government, both men had been vocal supporters of a swift return to civilian rule.

Notable among those now serving 15-year prison sentences are Dr Beko Ransome-Kuti, Chairman of the Campaign for Democracy and founder of the Committee for the Defence of Human Rights, and Shehu Sani, Vice-Chairman of the Campaign for Democracy. They were imprisoned for exposing the gross unfairness of the secret treason trials.

Other human rights campaigners have been detained without charge or trial. In January 1996 Sylvester Odion-Akhaine, Secretary General of the Campaign for Democracy, was released after a year's incommunicado detention without charge. He was assaulted as he hitch-hiked back to his home from Kebbi State in northern Nigeria, where he had been released without any money, and believes that government agents tried to kill him. In June 1996 Abdul Oroh, Executive Director of the Civil Liberties Organisation, and Dr Olatunji Abayomi, lawyer and Chair of Human Rights Africa, were released without explanation after nearly a year in detention without charge.

Prominent among those still administratively detained are veteran civil rights lawyers Chief Gani Fawehinmi and Femi Falana, both arrested in early 1996 and since held incommunicado and without charge or trial. Both were leading defence counsel in the Ogoni murder trials before they withdrew because of government interference in the proceedings. Over many years they have remained vigilant in pursuing the government through the courts in defence of human rights victims and constitutional rights, despite government contempt for the rule of law and their own repeated detentions in life-threatening conditions. Gani Fawehinmi was reported to have become seriously ill and to have required emergency hospital treatment several times in 1996 because of medical neglect and malnutrition. Court actions he had initiated to challenge the legality of the November 1995 executions and the constitutionality of Civil Disturbances Special Tribunals have been repeatedly adjourned.

Independent journalists have also been harassed and imprisoned. Four editors were among those convicted of treason and sentenced to 15 years' imprisonment for writing about the secret treason trials in 1995 Kunle Ajibade, Chris Anyanwu, George Mbah and Ben Charles Obi. Administrative staff and newspaper vendors have also been beaten and detained. Government agents are suspected of carrying out arson attacks in late 1995 on the Guardian and The News newspapers, and some opposition newspapers have been forced to operate clandestinely. Many journalists have been briefly detained, including foreign correspondents such as Paul Adams of the London Financial Times, who was held for a week in January 1996 after visiting Ogoniland. Nosa Igiebor, editor-in-chief of Tell magazine, evaded arrest until December 1995 when two editions of Tell were seized by the authorities, four other staff members briefly detained and vendors harassed. He was held incommunicado and without charge for six months, despite High Court orders for him to be brought to court and his detention justified, and for his wife to be allowed to take him required medication.

Also in prison are private citizens who stood by friends and relatives under threat of unfair trial and execution in 1995. They include Rebecca Ikpe and Sanusi Mato, relatives of armed forces officers sentenced to death (later commuted to life imprisonment) in the secret treason trials in 1995, who were jailed for providing support to the prisoners and their families.

## **Government reaction**

Under pressure, the military government has promised that it will restore democracy by 1998 and uphold human rights. In response to the international outcry over the executions of the Ogoni nine, the government denied that their trials before a Civil Disturbances Special Tribunal were politically motivated or unfair. However, following a critical report by a UN fact-finding mission to Nigeria in March/April 1996, the government removed military personnel from the Tribunal and granted a right of appeal from the Tribunal to the Court of Appeal. However, these reforms did not address the UN's most serious criticisms. The government's direct control of the Tribunal remains intact, including the appointment of its members and confirmation of its convictions and sentences.

The government has also failed to address the universal criticisms of the Special Military Tribunal which conducted the secret treason trials in 1995. And it has yet to be seen whether a National Human Rights Commission, appointed by the government in May 1996, will have any impact on bringing Nigeria's laws and practices into line with international standards.

In July 1996 the UN Human Rights Committee criticized the Nigerian government for a wide range of human rights abuses and urged it to repeal military decrees which suspend fundamental rights. By late August the government had still not agreed to allow investigative missions by the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group on Nigeria or by the UN Human Rights Commission's two Special Rapporteurs on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions and on the independence of judges and lawyers.

Without basic reforms and the political will to implement them, the occasional release of prisoners holds out little hope of long-term change. Seven prisoners were freed in January 1996 and a further seven in June during Nigeria's first meeting with Commonwealth officials since its suspension from the organization after the Ogoni executions. All had been held without charge or trial, mostly incommunicado, some for more than 18 months. In July 1996, 11 former soldiers imprisoned since a coup attempt in April 1990 were released without explanation.

However, military decrees continue to deny the courts powers to challenge detentions. Courts cannot safeguard prisoners' rights of access to families, lawyers or medical care, uphold prisoners' rights to fair trial or question government actions. Moshood Abiola, who should have the rights of a prisoner awaiting trial, has been denied access to family and doctors' visits, in defiance of court orders. Court challenges to the constitutionality or rulings of special tribunals have been effectively blocked. Administrative detainees continue to be denied any legal recourse against abuse of executive power, torture or ill-treatment.

The State Security (Detention of Persons) Decree, No. 2 of 1984, provides for the indefinite incommunicado detention without charge or trial of any person deemed to be a threat to the

security or the economy of the state. Such detention is completely arbitrary. The government is under no obligation to provide information about the grounds for the detention. It does not have to inform the detainee's family of the arrest, the place of detention or the detainee's state of health, let alone allow visits. Internal reviews of such detentions, introduced over the years in response to public pressure, do not allow detainees to challenge the detention, to find out what, if any, case there is to answer, or to offer any defence.

In June 1996 the government revoked a 1994 amendment to Decree 2 which had specifically prohibited the courts from ordering detainees to be produced before them. However, in practice it has continued to ignore such orders because Decree 2 still contains a clause removing the courts' jurisdiction. Further immunity for the government from the authority of the courts is provided by the Federal Military Government (Supremacy and Enforcement of Powers) Decree, No. 12 of 1994, which prohibits any legal action which challenges any military decree or which attempts to uphold human rights provisions of the Nigerian Constitution. In February 1996, as part of the government's transition to civilian rule program, it decreed itself arbitrary powers to remove elected officials and to detain anyone who criticized the transition. In the March 1996 local government elections, key opposition candidates were reportedly disqualified from standing for election or, once elected, were not allowed to take their seats.

## **Recommendations**

Nigerians who have spoken out in defence of human rights have been killed and imprisoned, in defiance of the government's international treaty commitments to uphold human rights.

Amnesty International makes the following recommendations:

-Amnesty International is calling for the immediate and unconditional release of all prisoners of conscience, including those who have been imprisoned for defending human rights, who have not used or advocated violence.

- Amnesty International is also calling for an open and independent judicial review of all convictions and sentences by special tribunals outside the normal court system which have tried political prisoners or imposed the death penalty, with a view to:

- the official publication of the findings and recommendations of the judicial review;
- the release or retrial of prisoners whose trials did not conform to international fair trial standards;
- compensation for victims of unfair trials and their relatives;
- the reform of such special tribunals to bring them into line with international standards or their abolition if this is impossible.

Amnesty International is also appealing for an end to the practice of executing prisoners, particularly after unfair and politically motivated trials. It is urging a thorough, prompt and impartial investigation into the killing of Kudirat Abiola, as well as into other attacks on government critics, with a view to prosecution of those responsible.

Below are the names of human rights defenders on whose behalf Amnesty International is launching special appeals. All are prisoners of conscience who have been imprisoned for their defence of human rights. Some are human rights lawyers, leading members of human rights organizations or journalists who have publicly criticized human rights violations by the government. Others are politicians who have publicly criticized the government's failure to restore political rights and return the country swiftly to democratic rule. Some are ordinary people who have supported friends and family caught up in the nightmare of political trials and imprisonment.

Moshood Abiola  
Frank Kokori, Milton Dabibi  
Ayo Opadokun, Abraham Adesanya,  
Ayo Adebajo, Ganiyu Dawodu  
General Olusegun Obasanjo, Major-General Shehu Musa Yar'Adua  
Chris Anyanwu, Ben Charles Obi  
Kunle Ajibade, George Mbah  
Dr Beko Ransome-Kuti, Shehu Sani  
Rebecca Ikpe, Sanusi Mato  
Chima Ubani  
Chief Gani Fawehinmi  
Femi Aborisade  
Femi Falana

#### **Endnotes**

1See *Nigeria: A travesty of justice secret treason trials and other concerns*, 26 October 1995 (AI Index: AFR 44/23/95).

2See *Nigeria: Time to end contempt for human rights* (AI Index: AFR 44/14/96) and *Nigeria: A 10-point program for human rights reform* (AI Index: AFR 44/15/96), published on 6 November 1996, for information about Amnesty International's further recommendations to the Nigerian authorities.

<http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/AFR44/016/1996/en/dom-AFR440161996en.html>