



Submission No 44

Review of Australia's Relationship with the Countries of Africa

Name: 'Dele Ogunmola

Organisation: Private Submission

Synopsis of Australia's Relationship with Nigeria

Name: 'Dele Ogunmola

Peace Studies,

University of New England,

Armidale, NSW

This contribution focuses on Australian and Nigerian bilateral relations. The main proposal that I address is how to improve on these by tapping the immense natural and human resources of Nigeria on the one hand and the options for Australian policy makers to have an effective influence in Nigeria.

Bilateral relations at the parliamentary and government level.

The judicial murder of the Nigerian environmental activist, Mr Ken Saro-Wiwa by the General Sanni Abacha Junta during The Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting in Auckland signalled a deep deterioration in Nigeria's diplomatic ties with major Western powers. Australia joined the international community in applying a regime of sanctions on the military government.

However, the advent of democracy in May 29, 1999 heralded a new era of political and economic vistas for Nigeria. The civilian government of President Olusegun Obasanjo embarked upon a policy of dialogue and reconciliation. There is a need for Australia to take bold steps in promoting intergovernmental relations in order to consolidate the gains of democracy. This can be done at diplomatic and parliamentary levels in order to strengthen the institutions of democracy in Nigeria.

The interface between Economic issues and politics.

Nigeria is endowed with oil and gas which are its major sources of revenues. Its large population makes it a good destination for investment. Australia can pursue a more energetic economic partnership in these areas. Australia can gain new trade and commercial ventures by encouraging a climate of investment between the private sectors of the two countries. For example, support for the Australia-Nigeria Business Council can act as a catalyst for trade opportunities for the two

countries. The presence of Australian companies is not really felt in Nigeria. Although this may be for historical reasons, other countries have been able to make an economic foray into Nigeria. The Chinese have been aggressive with the level of investment both at governmental and private levels. The Chinese are at the forefront in revamping the ailing railway system in Nigeria. South Africa has been investing in the telecommunications sector. Australian companies can also invest in these or other domain of the Nigerian economy. Although corruption has been a major obstacle to attracting the necessary Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) to Nigeria, the Australian government can assist in promoting transparency and accountability once the volume of trade becomes significantly important. Nigeria still remains a major destination for overseas investment for most Western multinationals in Sub Saharan Africa.

Cultural, scientific and educational relations and exchanges

The advent of democracy has led to an increase in these domains. The number of scholarships the Australian government has awarded to Nigerian students is remarkable. This is true, especially since the sanctions imposed by the Commonwealth on Nigeria following the hanging of Saro-Wiwa and other Ogoni leaders have been lifted. This leads us to the promotion of human rights, transparency and the rule of law which have not been seriously addressed in Australian-Nigerian relations and can only be effectively addressed once the personal and political links between the two countries have been strengthened. On the issue of migration, Nigeria has stopped being a country of destination for skilled migrants since the end of the oil boom. The pervasive harrowing experiences associated with the Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) and bad government policies have contributed to a high incidence of poverty. This has seriously compromised achieving the objectives of the Millennium Goals (MDGs). In this regard, the activities of Australian INGOs such as World Vision could go a long way in reducing child and maternal mortality and in the fight against poverty and the promotion of basic education, especially in the rural areas, where the incidence of poverty and disease is increasing at an alarming rate. The participation of Australian INGOs is greatly needed as they have proved to be efficient for example in Malawi.

Defence and Regional Security

Regional security can be promoted through regional organisations. The threat of transnational non-actors is a menace because of the notion of global citizen as demonstrated by the ugly bombing of Bali in which many Australians lost their lives.

Conclusion

There is a real opportunity for Australia and Nigeria to intensify bilateral trade, technical, and cultural ties. The potentials are there if matched with the political will, the two countries can mutually benefit from a cooperation that is based on the respect of human rights and the promotion of good governance.

On a personal note I would like to thank Australia for the opportunity to study peace studies at the University of New England. Studying at a regional university has given me an unique opportunity to exchange views with Australian staff and students. Equally importantly, I have been able to meet with the townspeople of Armidale and through their kindness to learn about life in rural Australia as well as to show them that there is more to Nigeria than e-mail scams and Islamic extremism.