

**TITLE PAGE**

**SANCTIONS AND STATES BEHAVIOUR: A CASE STUDY OF NIGERIA  
UNDER SANI ABACHA REGIME, 1993-1998**

**BY**

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## CERTIFICATION

This is to Certify that this project was carried out by Esther Femi Babatunde in the Department of History and International Studies, University of Benin under my supervision.

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## **DEDICATION**

This project is dedicated to my uncle, Rev. Father Daniel Nicholas Aleakhue Oshiokede.

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## TABLE OF CONTENT

Certification	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	ii
Dedication	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	iii
Acknowledgement	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	iv
Chapter One: Background to Study	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1
Chapter Two: Nigeria Under Sani Abacha Regime 1993-1998	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	20
Chapter Three: Sanctions Imposed on Nigeria	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	33
Chapter Four: Consequences of Sanctions on Nigeria Development and Growth	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	52
Chapter Five: Conclusion	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	64
Bibliography	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	68

## **Abstract**

This study examines the relationship between international sanctions and state behavior, using Nigeria under the regime of Sani Abacha (1993–1998) as a case study. It interrogates the extent to which sanctions, imposed largely in response to human rights violations and democratic backsliding, influenced political decisions, governance patterns, and socio-economic outcomes within the Nigerian state.

Chapter One provides the background to the study, situating sanctions within the broader framework of international relations and foreign policy instruments. It outlines the research problem, objectives, and significance, emphasizing the persistent debate over whether sanctions effectively compel authoritarian regimes to alter their behavior or merely deepen internal repression and economic hardship.

Chapter Two offers a detailed examination of Nigeria under Abacha's regime, highlighting the consolidation of military power, suppression of political opposition, and widespread human rights abuses. This chapter establishes the internal conditions that prompted international condemnation and set the stage for sanctions.

Chapter Three analyzes the various sanctions imposed on Nigeria by international actors, including diplomatic isolation, economic restrictions, and Nigeria's suspension from key international organizations. It explores the motivations behind these measures and the mechanisms through which they were enforced.

Chapter Four assesses the consequences of these sanctions on Nigeria's development and growth. It argues that while sanctions increased external pressure on the regime, their impact was complex and multifaceted. Economically, they contributed to reduced foreign investment and strained international relations. Politically, however, the regime demonstrated resilience, often circumventing restrictions while maintaining internal control. Socially, the burden of sanctions disproportionately affected ordinary citizens rather than the ruling elite.

Finally, Chapter Five concludes that sanctions, in the Nigerian case, had limited success in altering state behavior during Abacha's rule. Instead, they exposed the challenges of using external pressure to influence entrenched authoritarian systems. The study contributes to a broader understanding of the effectiveness of sanctions as a policy tool, suggesting that without complementary internal dynamics and international cohesion, their capacity to induce meaningful political change remains constrained.

# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

### **Background to the Study**

International sanctions have become a routinely applied tool in global diplomacy and multilateral institutions, serving as economic, diplomatic or military instruments designed to compel a target state to alter its behaviour. These measures often imposed in response to human-rights violations, acts of aggression, undemocratic governance or nuclear proliferation have grown increasingly controversial due to their expanded use and considerable costs. Underlying these sanctions is the assumption that imposing economic or political pressure will induce the target state to conform to international norms.<sup>1</sup>

However, the effectiveness of Sanctions in achieving these objectives has remained a subject of significant academic and policy debate. The effectiveness of sanctions is hindered by at least two major limitations. First, it is challenging to define precisely what the sanctions aim to achieve and to determine when that goal has been reached whether the stated objective announced by policymakers, an unstated target, or merely the appearance of decisive action. Second, like domestic legal sanctions, international sanctions not only seek to alter specific behaviour but can also serve a broader deterrent function, discouraging future undesirable actions.<sup>2</sup>

One of the most prominent and complex cases of international sanctions in Africa occurred in Nigeria during the military rule of Sani Abacha 1993–1998. His regime was characterised by authoritarian governance, rampant corruption, gross human-rights abuses and deteriorating international relations. At this time, Nigeria Africa's most populous nation and one of its largest economies became increasingly isolated on the global stage. After seizing power via a military coup in November 1993, Abacha dismantled democratic institutions and governed by decree, effectively shutting down political opposition and civil liberties.<sup>3</sup> His government was characterized by a climate of fear, the suppression of dissent and a crackdown on pro-democracy movements. The four and half years of the Sani Abacha regime stand out as a watershed in the history of Independence.

One of the most defining aspects of the Abacha regime was its confrontational posture toward both domestic and international calls for reforms. The annulment of the 1993 Presidential election widely regarded as Nigeria's freest and fairest at the time triggered a national crisis and drew sharp criticism from the international community. The execution of nine environmental activists from Ogoni region including Ken Saro-Wiwa in 1995, marked a turning point in Nigeria's international standing. The act was widely condemned, prompting a series of diplomatic and economic sanctions from the United States, the European Union, the Commonwealth, and several other international organizations and countries. These sanctions were aimed at pressuring the regime to

Improve its human rights records, restore democratic governance and uphold international norms. Despite these Sanctions the Abacha regime remained defiant. human rights records continued to deteriorate. The regime's response to the Sanctions was Characterized by a mix of defiance, manipulation and negotiation, aimed at mitigating the effects of the Sanctions and maintaining Power.<sup>4</sup>

From an economic standpoint, the sanctions imposed on Nigeria during the Sani Abacha regime coincided with profound economic instability marked by dwindling foreign investment, soaring inflation, increasing poverty, and infrastructure decay. The regime's economic mismanagement, compounded by the external sanctions, deepened Nigeria's developmental challenges; yet the degree to which these adverse outcomes stemmed directly from sanctions, rather than from internal governance failures, remains an important area of inquiry.<sup>5</sup>

Moreover, given Nigeria's strategic significance in Africa as one of the continent's largest economies and most populous nations the international response to the Sani Abacha regime was inherently more complex. While there was a strong moral imperative to act against the regime's abuses, geopolitical considerations also shaped the nature, scope and enforcement of sanctions. Nigeria's role as a regional peace-keeping power and a major oil producer influenced how far some countries were willing to go in isolating the regime.<sup>6</sup>

The imposition of international sanctions during this period played a significant role in shaping Nigeria's domestic and foreign policies. Critics argue that the sanctions disproportionately affected ordinary Nigerians rather than the ruling elites. While others contend that they helped lay the ground work for the eventual political transition following Abacha sudden death in 1998. By focusing on Nigeria under Abacha this research seeks to provide an understanding of how external pressure with internal political Dynamics and what this reveal about the broader effectiveness of sanctions in the international system.

This study aims to examine the impact of these sanctions on Nigeria state behavior including its economic political and social dimensions. It also outlines the research objective questions, significance as well as the scope and limitations.

### **Aim and Objectives**

The primary aim of this research is to provide a comprehensive analysis of the impact of international sanctions on Nigeria during the Abacha regime of 1993 to 1998. Below are the project aim and objectives.

1. 1 to examine the impact of international sanctions on Nigeria state behavior during the Abacha regime of 1993 to 1998
2. To analyze the economic consequences of sanctions on Nigeria's development and growth during Abacha regime.

3. To assess the effectiveness of sanctions in influencing Nigeria state behavior and policy changes during the Abacha regime.
4. To explore the relationship between international sanctions and state sovereignty using Nigeria as a case study.
5. So, identify the lessons learned from Nigeria's experience with sanctions during the Abacha regime and their implication for future Nigerian relation.

The project will address the following questions:

1. What were the key factors that led to the imposition of international Sanctions on Nigeria during the Abacha regime?
2. How did the sanctions affect Nigeria's state behavior and policy decisions during Abacha era.
3. What were the economic consequences of sanctions on Nigeria's development and growth during the Abacha regime?
4. How did Nigeria respond to the sanctions and what strategies did the government employ to mitigate their impacts?
5. What is the implication of Nigeria's experience with sanctions for future Nigerian relation and global governance?

## **Scope of Study**

This research focuses on the relationship between international relations and state behavior with reference to Nigeria under the Abacha military regime between 1993 to 1998. The scope of the study is limited to the time frame of Abacha's rule from November 1993 to June 1998. During this period Nigeria faced extensive international condemnation and sanctions in response to his series of Human Rights violations, anti-democratic practices and the execution of the Ogoni nine activists including Ken Saro-Wiwa. This period also witnessed Nigeria's increasing isolation from the global community with sanctions imposed by entities such as the Commonwealth of Nations, the European Union and the United States.

Economically the study will explore the ramifications of sanctions on Nigeria's development indicators including foreign investments, trade and internal economic stability. It will also examine how the Nigeria government under Abacha responded to these external pressures including internal policy shifts, diplomatic strategies, and propaganda mechanisms employed to counteract the effects of isolation.

The study will also assess the overall effectiveness of the sanctions in achieving their intended objectives. It will examine whether the sanctions succeeded in altering Nigeria's domestic or international behavior or whether they instead entrenched authoritarianism and exacerbated economic hardships for ordinary Nigerians.

The scope of this study includes the political, economic, and diplomatic dimensions of Nigeria's experience with sanctions under general Sani Abacha and seek to provide an informed analysis of the interplay between international pressure and States behavior during a critical moment in the country's history.

## **Methodology**

This research adopts an historical methodology as well as a qualitative research method anchored in a case study design to explore how international sanctions influenced the behavior of the Nigerian State under the military leadership of General Sani Abacha. The choice of a case study approach is necessary because it enables an in-depth analysis of complex political and economic development within a specific historical and geopolitical context. The research utilized secondary source of materials which include books and academic journals focusing on Nigeria political history, international relations, and the use of sanctions e.g Nigeria during the Abacha years 1993-1998 by IFRA, Nigeria articles from scholarly database like JSTOR, Google scholar, and researchGates. etc.

## **Literature Review**

In international relations, sanctions are measures imposed by one or more countries or international organisations to influence the behaviour of a target state, entity or individual. These measures whether economic, diplomatic or political are designed to exert pressure in order to induce changes in policy, actions or conduct. Sanctions can take various forms

including economic sanction trade embargoes, assets freeze, travel bans, and diplomatic isolation. The primary objective of sanctions is to compel a target state, entity or individual to modify its behavior or policies without resorting to military force. Sanctions may be applied to address a variety of issues including human rights abuses, nuclear proliferation, terrorism and aggression and can also serve to advance democracy, stability and the rule of law.<sup>7</sup> Sanctions can exert a profound impact on a target country's economy, population and political system manifesting in economic hardships, heightened poverty and diminished access to essential goods and services. In some instances, sanctions may also trigger unintended outcomes such as the consolidation of government control over the populace or the emergence of humanitarian crises.<sup>8</sup>

The effectiveness of sanctions in achieving their intended objectives remains the subject of ongoing debate. On one hand, sanctions are viewed as a potentially effective tool for influencing state behaviour particularly when they are precisely targeted and enjoy broad international support. On the other hand, critics argue that sanctions can prove counter-productive, generating increased resentment and resistance among the population of the targeted state.<sup>9</sup>

### **Economic Sanctions**

According to the book economic sanctions reconsidered Sanctions was defined as the deliberate government inspired withdraw or threats of withdrawal of customary trade or financial relations imposed by sender country on a target country to coerce a policy

change or punish non-compliance with international norms.<sup>10</sup> This definition highlights the coercive and intentional nature of sanctions differentiating them from routine commercial or diplomatic interactions.

Complimenting this foundational perspective, KruliKowski from the U.S international trade commission's frames sanctions as punitive measures imposed by one or more countries or multilateral bodies on a target country entity or group that violates international norms<sup>11</sup> with the purpose of restricting economic activities and influencing a target behavior during crisis where diplomacy is inadequate but military action is to severe.<sup>11</sup>This conveys the dual role of sanction as both deterrents and coercive tools employed within a middle spectrum of foreign policy options balancing between peaceful engagement and armed conflict. In a broader institutional context international organization such as the United Nations Security council characterize sanctions as binding restrictive measures to address violation of international norms by inducing target States or non-state actors to modify their behavior.<sup>12</sup> The councils legal binding resolutions often specify assets freeze travel bans and arms embargoes all designed to uphold collective security and international order. furthermore international law scholars note that sanctions while being coercive must adhere to principles of proportionality and humanitarian considerations aiming to avoid broad suffering among civilians.<sup>13</sup> The Oxford research encyclopedia of politics also defines sanctions as attempt by States to coerce policy change by restricting economic relationships emphasizing the transactions

Dynamics involved and the strategic use of economic interdependence as leverage.<sup>14</sup> This strategic view underscores sanctions as tools embedded within brother's state crafts aimed at shaping international behavior through economic constraints.

### **Diplomatic Sanctions**

Diplomatic sanctions in international relations refer to political measures imposed by one or more States to express disapproval or displeasure toward the actions or policies of another state. Scholars emphasized that diplomatic sanctions function as a level of coercive diplomacy, they operate by signaling disapproval and seeking to change the behavior of the targeted regime or state through political disengagement. Such sanctions may convey a collective condemnation of breaches in international norms serving as a symbolic but potent form of international accountability.<sup>15</sup>

The strategic value of diplomatic sanctions lies in their ability to isolate and delegitimize a target regime internationally. Such measures are often preferred when direct military intervention or comprehensive economic sanctions are too risky or potentially counterproductive. By disrupting diplomatic interactions such as suspending ambassadorial exchanges or limiting participation in multilateral forums sanctioning states aim to signal disapproval and pressure the targeted entity into compliance or policy change. In this way, diplomatic sanctions function both symbolically and strategically as tools of coercive diplomacy.<sup>16</sup>

The effectiveness of diplomatic sanctions is often contingent on their contextual design and enforcement. Factors such as the sanctioning state's diplomatic network, the target state's political structure, and the level of international support all influence their impact. The presence of democratic institutions and credible commitment by the sanctioning states can raise domestic audience costs for leaders who fail to follow through, and reduce uncertainty about their willingness to enforce sanctions, thereby enhancing the likelihood of success.<sup>17</sup>

### **Multilateral Sanctions**

According to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute SIPRI , multilateral sanctions are policy tools intended to coerce states or non-governmental actors into improving their behaviour in the interests of international peace and security or to limit arms transfers to a specific conflict. These sanctions typically take the form of arms embargoes, travel bans, economic sanctions and restrictive financial measures.<sup>18</sup>

### **Unilateral Sanctions**

Unilateral Sanctions are implemented not by the United Security council but by a single State it groups of States targeting another State's or persons within a targeted State. Conversely, some scholars such as..... question the legitimacy and efficacy of Unilateral Sanctions especially when they bypass international framework.<sup>19</sup> Legal scholars have also scrutinized the use of Unilateral Sanctions in light of international law

Laurence Heifer and Joel Trachtman in their work "Legal Aspects of Unilateral Sanctions" examine whether such measures violate the principles of non-intervention and free trade embedded in international legal framework.<sup>20</sup> Scholars like Thomas Biersteker have emphasized the importance of targeted Sanctions and international cooperation over unilateral measure.

### **Sanctions by International Bodies UN AND EU**

According to the Diplomatic Service of the European Union, the EU sanctions are tools under the common foreign and security policy CFSP to uphold international law, prevent international crises, support conflict resolution etc.

Sanctions are a useful tool to support third world countries, consolidate democracy and law to hold violators of human rights accountable for their crimes.

The EU implements all Sanctions adopted by the United Nations Security council to maintain or restore international Peace and security. UN sanctions are automatically transposed into EU law. Occasionally, the EU applies additional measures to complement and reinforce United Nations Sanctions.

### **States Reaction to Sanctions**

Robert A. Pape posits that economic sanctions rarely achieve their intended goals arguing that States often resist external pressure by rallying domestic support around nationalist

sentiments.<sup>21</sup> According to Pape, Sanctions often fail because they underestimate the target state ability to adapt, find alternative partners and manipulate internal politics dynamics to reduce domestic oppositions. This is evident in the case of Iraq under Saddam Hussein. Despite a decade-long comprehensive sanctions regime following the 1990 invasion of Kuwait, the Iraqi regime remained intact until military intervention in 2003. The regime adopted various strategies to circumvent the sanctions' effects, such as engaging in illicit trade and oil smuggling.<sup>22</sup>

In contrast, Daniel W. Drezner contends that sanctions can work especially when they are embedded within a broader diplomatic campaign, and when the target is economically interdependent with the sanctioning state or the latter acts as part of a coalition.<sup>23</sup> For example, when multilateral sanctions in the early 2010s targeted the financial and energy sectors of Iran, the measures placed serious strain on its economy. These sanctions applied in the context of diplomatic negotiations helped pave the way for the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action in 2015. Iran's willingness to negotiate under these conditions suggests that when sanctions are well-targeted and supported by a coalition, they can prompt behavioural change.<sup>24</sup>

However, states do not always comply when faced with sanctions. Many respond through defiance seeking to reduce their dependence on sanctioning powers and to bolster alternative alliances. The case of Russia after the 2014 annexation of Crimea is illustrative. Western countries-imposed sanctions targeting individuals, banks and sectors

such as energy and defense. Another striking example is North Korea: despite being one of the most heavily sanctioned states in the world, it has maintained its nuclear weapons programmes and flouted international norms. Scholars such as Stephan Haggard and Marcus Noland argue that such a regime-survival strategy rests on extreme internal control, illicit economic activity and selective engagement with external actors like China and Russia.<sup>25</sup>

State's reaction to sanctions is also shaped by its domestic political institutions. Democracies and autocracies often exhibit distinct behavioural patterns. Democratic governments, being more sensitive to public pressure, may be more inclined to concede when sanctions cause widespread and visible hardship. Autocratic regimes, however, can suppress dissent and redirect state resources to maintain elite loyalty. The apartheid government of South Africa is frequently highlighted as a case where sanctions together with domestic resistance and international isolation contributed to a negotiated political transition.<sup>26</sup>

Although scholars like Audie Koltz emphasize The symbolic and normative impacts of sanction in delegitimizing the regime.<sup>27</sup> Others argue that internal political Dynamics where the primary drivers of change.

States also employ legal and diplomatic strategies to contest the legitimacy of sanctions. For instance, under Nicolás Maduro, Venezuela has repeatedly denounced U.S. sanctions as violations of national sovereignty and has sought backing from international bodies

such as the United Nations and the Non-Aligned Movement.<sup>28</sup> In some instances, sanctions may generate unintended outcomes, such as exacerbating humanitarian crises, empowering hardline elements, or weakening civil society structures.

A target state's capacity to respond effectively to sanctions is frequently shaped by its geopolitical standing and the broader international distribution of power.<sup>29</sup> Countries possessing strategic importance or limited natural resources often attract allies willing to bypass or soften sanctions for political or economic benefits. For example, Sudan under Omar al-Bashir was able to endure years of sanctions by cultivating strategic partnerships and leveraging its oil reserves.<sup>30</sup> Similarly, the military junta in Myanmar has depended on regional backing, particularly from China and Russia, to withstand pressure from Western nations.<sup>31</sup>

## **Chapterization**

Chapter One: Introduction

Background to the Study

Aim And Objectives

Scope of Study

Methodology

Literature Review

Chapter Outline

Chapter Two:

Nigeria Under Sani Abacha Regime 1993-1998

Chapter Three

Sanctions Imposed on Nigeria.

Chapter Four

Consequences of Sanctions on Nigeria Development and Growth.

Chapter Five

Conclusion.

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## CHAPTER 2

### NIGERIA UNDER SANI ABACHA REGIME 1993-1998

Sani ABACHA seizure of Power was the last successful coup d' etat in Nigeria military history. He wielded power with an unyielding attitude and his rule heralded and unprecedented total disregard for human rights with several political assassinations and summary executions of dissidents and political opponents in Nigeria. Abacha is considered one of the twentieth century most corrupt dictator and as a kleptocrat for the alleged embezzlement of US\$2-5 billion which is alleged to have been hidden by Abacha's family in Switzerland as well as other jurisdiction including Liechtenstein.<sup>1</sup> As the minister of Defense and the most senior official within the military hierarchy during the crisis of the third Republic, he orchestrated the coup d' état of 1993 which overthrew the interim government of Ernest Shonekan. In his nationwide broadcast, Abacha portrayed the overthrow as an act of stability brought through the sociopolitical uncertainties caused by the 1993 presidential election. His rule drew disrepute to Nigeria with the country becoming a Pariah state in international Relations particularly in regards to the execution of environmental activists; Ken Saro-Wiwa. Abacha's death in 1998 brought about Nigeria fourth Republic, a year later and he was succeeded by General Abdusalami Abubakar.

## **The Coup and the Consolidation of Power:**

By the early 1990s Nigeria's turbulent return to civilian rule had waned into disillusionment. Military ruler, Ibrahim Babaginda had initiated a transition program in 1986 culminating in the landmark June 12, 1993 presidential election, where Moshood K. O. Abiola popularly known as M.K.O. Abiola appeared to have won the election but Babaginda annulled the results fearing ethnic schisms and his own loss of influence, this triggering massive public outrage and undermining the legitimacy of the process entirely. Scholars have described Babaginda's reforms as a carefully managed facade rather than a genuine Democratization. During this period, civil society groups and the press became increasingly outspoken, criticizing the regime for delaying its promised reforms while engaging in corrupt practices, including bribing legislators to maintain an unjust rule. Olatunji Dare, a columnist for The Guardian newspaper, lamented that in other countries, ministers resign when their integrity is questioned but in Nigeria, such standards of accountability were rare.<sup>2</sup>

The constitutional crisis peaked after Babaginda abruptly handed power to Ernest Shonekan's interim government in August 1993. Shonekan Civilian administration lacking electoral foundation or popular mandate was undermined from its inception and eventually invalidate by the Lagos High court in November.<sup>3</sup> Under every growing pressure, Babaginda concession of power revealed not a closure but a void.

As opposition to Shonekan intensified, defense minister, Sani Abacha moved decisively. Having ascended through military machinations, playing a key role in foiling previous coup attempts including the 1990 Orkar Coup, Abacha had risen to powerful positions.<sup>4</sup> With state authority collapsing and the interim government widely regarded as illegitimate, Sani Abacha staged a bloodless palace coup on November 17, 1993, accusing Shonekan of incompetence and policy paralysis, and effectively compelling him to resign.<sup>5</sup> Scholars frame this as a classic palace coup. According to Bamidele Ojo and Ian Campbell, Abacha's decrees swiftly dismantled existing democratic institutions; the constitution and courts were suspended, political parties were dissolved, and military governors were reinstated across the states.<sup>6</sup>

Adewunmi analysis characterize Abacha's rule as overtly patrimonial, focused on enriching himself and his inner circle by transferring States Contracts and Funds to Kin and military cronies.<sup>7</sup> The backdrop to this power grab was an economy in disarray and a public exhausted by false Democratization.

The Abacha Coup was not was not an abrupt overreach, but rather the culmination of embedded dysfunction. A stalled transition, depleted civic legitimacy, economic distress and sustained elite manipulation created ripe conditions for a retrenchment by militarized elite.

Upon assuming power, Abacha quickly moved to centralized authority. He restructured the military and political hierarchy in his favour. Immediately after the coup, he dissolved

all democratic structures and banned political activities, effectively ending the short-lived attempt to transition to civilian rule following the annulled June 12, 1993, Presidential election. He positioned loyalists in strategic positions within the military and civil service to ensure unwavering allegiance. He formed the Provisional Ruling Council P.R.C. .

Abacha's regime was not only built on military power but on surveillance and propaganda. The State Security Service SSS under his command became a potent instrument of control. Journalists, Human Right activists and political opponents were arrested and detained without trial. The regime banned newspapers, and radios that dared to criticize the government. In 1995, the regime cracks down heavily on activists in what became known as the "Phantom Coup" trials. Prominent political figures, including Musa Yar'Adua, were arrested and imprisoned on fabricated charges of plotting to overthrow Abacha's government. Yar'Adua later died in detention under unclear and suspicious circumstances.

One of the Most chilling displays of the Abacha regime was the execution of Ken Saro-Wiwa. Ken Saro-Wiwa born in 1941 in Bori into the Ogoni ethnic minority was an activist. As oil giants, Shell Petroleum Development Company SDC extracted crude from the Niger Delta precisely Ogoni, the constant extraction of crude oil from Ogoni soon turned the Land into a toxic landscape. Rivers were polluted as well as farmlands and the air was also coated with thick gas flares. While the money gotten from the crude oil was used to develop other Nigeria States and foreign companies, the Ogoni people

suffered. This led to the rise of Ken Saro-Wiwa. In the 1990s Ken Saro-Wiwa co-founded the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP), which presented the famous "Ogoni Bill of Rights" demanding political autonomy, fair share of oil revenue, and environmental protection for the Ogoni people. The Nigeria military regime saw his movement as a threat. By 1993, MOSOP had mobilized the Ogoni people to force Shell to suspend operations in their land. This nonviolent resistance embarrassed the military government. In 1994, four Ogoni chiefs were killed in an internal conflict, this gave the Abacha regime the pretext it needed to apprehend Ken Saro-Wiwa. Without credible evidence, Ken Saro-Wiwa and several other MOSOP leaders were arrested as suspects in the alleged murder case. What followed was a sham trial conducted by a special military tribunal established by the Abacha government. The proceedings were marred by bias, procedural irregularities, and intimidation of defense lawyers, who were often denied access to their clients. Amnesty International condemned the trial as a "travesty of justice."<sup>8</sup>

In November 1995, despite global appeal and international outcry from leaders including Nelson Mandela and Pope John Paul II, Ken Saro-Wiwa and eight other Ogoni activists were sentenced to death by hanging. The execution of these men shocked the world and exposed the brutality of the Abacha regime. With immediate effects, Nigeria was suspended from the Commonwealth and several countries imposed sanctions. Wole

Soyinka, the Nigeria Nobel laureate described the act as "judicial murder" and warned that Nigeria has become a "Pariah nation"<sup>9</sup>

The execution and death of Ken Saro-Wiwa laid bare the extent of human rights abuse under Abacha regime. The Press was muzzled and in 1994, several newspapers were banned including The Guardian, Punch and Tell Magazine. Prominent journalists like Chris Anyanwu Publisher of the Sunday Magazine were arrested and sentenced to life imprisonment on false charges of plotting a Coup.

Abacha's administration oversaw an increase in the country's foreign exchange reserves from 494 million dollars in 1993 to 9.6 billion dollars by the middle of 1993 and reduced the external debt of Nigeria from 36 billion dollars in 1993 to 27 billion dollars in 1997.<sup>10</sup> Abacha also constructed between 25 and 100km of Urban Road in major cities such as Kano, Gusau, Benin, Funtua, Zaria, Enugu, Kaduna, Aba, Lagos Lokoja and Porth Harcourt. Abacha brought the privatization programs of Ibrahim Babaginda administration to a halt, reduced an inflation rate of 54% inherited from Ernest Shonekan to 8.5% between 1993 and 1997, all while the nation's primary commodity, oil, was at an average of \$15 per barrel GDP growth despite being estimated to be higher than 22% growth in 1995, was largely limited to the Petroleum sector <sup>11</sup>.

When Abacha seized control of power, he inherited an economy in serious distress the structural adjustment programs SAB introduced by former military regimes under pressure from the International Monetary Fund IMG had led to a widespread economic

hardship. Inflation was high, unemployment was skyrocketing and the naira had lost so much of its value. Recognizing the need for economic control, Abacha initially sought to impose a more stable policy framework. In 1994, he introduced a fixed exchange rate regime, pegging the naira officially at 22naira to \$1, while the parallel market rate was nearly double. The rationale behind this policy was to curb inflation, reduce the cost of imports and stabilize the currency. However, rather than achieve stability, the fixed rate led to a thriving black market and widespread arbitrage. Those with access to official foreign exchange markets, particularly regime insiders, made enormous profits by purchasing dollars at the government rate and selling them on the parallel market at exorbitant margins. This dual exchange system institutionalized corruption and enriched a small elite connected to the ruling military cabal.

In the fiscal domain, Abacha launched a vision 2010 committee in 1996, a supposedly forward-looking plan to diversify the economy and reduce Nigeria's dependence on oil. On paper, the Vision 2010 proposed reforms such as privatizing state-owned enterprises, increasing transparency in government spending, and improving infrastructure. However, in practice, none of these reforms materialized meaningfully. The process was marred by lack of commitment, weak institutional structures, and widespread embezzlement of public enterprises such as the Nigeria Telecommunications Limited NITEL , the Nigeria National Petroleum Corporation NNPC , and the Nigeria Ports authority NPA remained grossly inefficient and corporated more as patronage outfits than productive state entities.

Oil which accounted for over 90% of Nigeria foreign exchange remained the central pillar of the economy, but revenue from oil exports largely disappeared into private pocket through misappropriation and fraudulent contracts.<sup>12</sup>

During his time in power from 1993 to 1998, Sani Abacha and his close associates are believed to have siphoned off between US\$3 billion and US\$5 billion from Nigeria's public treasury. Much of this was funneled via the Central Bank of Nigeria under the pretext of "security operations", before being transferred to foreign accounts.<sup>13</sup> Abacha and his national security adviser, Alhaji Ismaila Gwarzo would fabricate emergency security threats, prompting the release of vast sums of money often in cash from the Central Bank. These funds were either moved electronically to offshore accounts in Europe and in middle East. A 2002 investigation by Swiss authorities revealed that at least \$700 million had been traced to the Abacha family and frozen in Swiss bank accounts<sup>14</sup>. In one instance the central bank was directed to transfer about \$60 million directly into a foreign account without any official documents or Parliamentary approval.<sup>15</sup>

These systematic lootings had crippling effects on Nigeria's economy and governance. Essential infrastructure deteriorated drastically, roads, hospitals, schools and water systems collapsed. The United Nations reported that, despite Nigeria's huge oil earnings, the country remained among the poorest in the world: around 70% of Nigerians were

living in absolute poverty roughly 84 million people .<sup>16</sup> Public sector salaries were frequently delayed and strikes by doctors, teachers and civil servants became routine.

During the Abacha era, Nigeria's informal sector expanded dramatically as many citizens could no longer depend on state employment or basic public services. Rural communities suffered severe neglect due to minimal investment, prompting large-scale migration to urban centers, which further strained inadequate city infrastructure. Beyond the economic collapse, the regime produced a deep moral and institutional decay corruption became normalized and openly practiced as a tool of governance. The judiciary was subjugated, the legislature dissolved, and civil society organizations faced systematic censorship and intimidation.<sup>17</sup>

Despite its notoriety, the Abacha administration succeeded in achieving a degree of macroeconomic stability that drew cautious praise from some financial analysts. Inflation, which had risen sharply to nearly 57 percent in 1993, declined significantly to about 8.5 percent by 1997, reflecting tighter monetary controls and improved fiscal management.<sup>18</sup>. Nigeria's foreign reserves also experienced a notable increase during Abacha's administration, rising to approximately US \$9.6 billion by the time his rule ended in 1998, reflecting cautious fiscal management amid relatively low oil prices.

But this macroeconomic stability was as a result of capital controls and oil windfalls not of productive reforms. The bulk of oil revenue was not reinvested in the economy but looted. Moreover, low inflation did not mean that goods were affordable or that services

were accessible. In many Urban areas, the cost of basic commodities was still beyond the reach of average citizens and access to healthcare or education had become a luxury. Prices remained high in local markets and unemployment continued to skyrocket especially among youths.

During the Sani Abacha regime, Nigeria saw the emergence of a powerful rentier class – made up of military officers, businessmen and senior bureaucrats – who profited massively from oil deals, import licences and state patronage. This group operated a parallel shadow economy to the official one, and their hold on power depended on their allegiance to Abacha. The public-procurement system was rife with inflated contracts and “ghost” projects: for example, road construction schemes were commissioned and funds released, but the roads were never built, even though government records declared them complete. The federal Ministry of Works and Housing in particular became a major locus for such corruption, with contractors routinely bribing officials in order to access funds for non-existent projects. <sup>20</sup>

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## CHAPTER THREE

### SANCTIONS IMPOSED ON NIGERIA

"What further proof is demanded by the world? Why have African leaders-heads of states and revolutionary veterans-failed until now to halt Abacha's repetitious game or to challenge his transparent ploy of purchasing time? Take the regime's elaborate charade called 'transition to civilian rule.' Even as it becomes clearer by the day that Abacha, ever the ludicrous imitator of his predecessor Ibrahim Babangida, is seeking to perpetuate himself as a civilian president, foreign governments continue to say let's wait a little longer."<sup>1</sup>

According to the Human Right Watch, Sanctions imposed on Nigeria by western governments following the annulment of the 1993 elections and the military coup which followed, and strengthened after the November 10, 1995 executions of Ken Saro-Wiwa and eight other Ogoni activists, have remained in place over the last two years. Nevertheless, international attention on Nigeria has lessened, as Nigeria's major trading partners have returned to protecting their short-term economic interests and have taken no further concrete measures to speed the return of civilian rule. Meanwhile, the Nigerian government has increased its contacts with states such as China, North Korea, Libya and Iran.

## **The Commonwealth**

The Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting CHOGM that was taking place in Auckland, New Zealand at the time of the executions immediately demonstrated its outrage by suspending Nigeria from the Commonwealth, the first time that this step had been taken. Nigeria was granted a two-year period to fulfill the requirements of the 1991 Harare Commonwealth Declaration which mandates member states to uphold democratic governance or risk expulsion from the Commonwealth.<sup>2</sup> At the same meeting CHOGM adopted the Millbrook Commonwealth Action Programme on the Harare Commonwealth Declaration, which included a commitment to take measures in response to violations of the Harare principles. A Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group CMAG, which was appointed to deal with persistent violations, committed itself to examining, in the first instance, the cases of Nigeria, Sierra Leone and the Gambia, the three Commonwealth countries without democratically elected governments.<sup>3</sup> Both Nigeria's suspension from the Commonwealth and the mandate of CMAG must be considered by CHOGM in Edinburgh in October 1997.

On April 23, 1996, following its second meeting, CMAG recommended that Commonwealth members implement various measures against Nigeria, including visa restrictions on and denial of educational facilities to members of the Nigerian regime and their families, withdrawal of military attachés from Nigeria and cessation of military training, an embargo on the export of arms, a visa-based ban on sporting contacts, and the

downgrading of diplomatic and cultural links. It was also recommended that the Commonwealth consider, in consultation with the E.U., U.S. and other members of the international community, a ban on air links and additional economic measures, including freezing the financial assets and bank accounts in foreign countries of members of the regime and their families. At a further meeting on June 24-25, 1996, however, the imposition of the sanctions agreed upon in April, which had been delayed to give Nigeria time to engage in dialogue with CMAG about its human rights record, was further postponed, although existing measures consequent on Nigeria's suspension from the Commonwealth remained in place.

A mission from CMAG finally visited Nigeria for two days in November 1996, although the Nigerian government insisted that the visit was not a "fact-finding" mission, which had already been undertaken by the U.N., but a continuation of dialogue and discussion.<sup>4</sup> The government refused to allow members of the mission to visit political prisoners or members of the pro-democracy and human rights movement, ensuring that all meetings were with government supporters. The Canadian delegation did not join the mission, after the Nigerian government refused to grant visas to two security officers, in apparent retaliation at Canada's hard line against Nigeria within CMAG.<sup>5</sup> Three political detainees Gani Fawehinmi, Femi Falana and Femi Aborisade were, however, released at the time of the visit.

CMAG met several times during 1997. In July, CMAG held public hearings on the situation in Nigeria-a first for the Commonwealth-to which Nigerian human rights and opposition groups, as well as international groups including Human Rights Watch, were invited to make submissions. In September, CMAG met again to finalize its recommendations to CHOGM. Although no official statement was issued, comments by foreign ministers attending the meeting indicated that the group would recommend to CHOGM that Nigeria's suspension from the Commonwealth be continued. It was unclear whether additional sanctions would also be recommended.

In February 1997, African heads of government from Commonwealth countries-except for Nigeria-met in Gaborone, Botswana at a "Roundtable on Democracy and Good Governance in Africa." The concluding statement stated that: "Heads of Government reaffirmed their commitment to the principles contained in the Harare Commonwealth Declaration, which included the protection and promotion of democracy, democratic processes and institutions which reflect national circumstances. They stressed in particular the universally accepted ingredients of democracy which included the right of a people to elect freely their government; the primacy of the rule of law and the independence of the judiciary; the rights of freedom of expression and association; and the transparency and accountability of government." The heads of government also noted that "with only one exception, all African member countries had now moved away from military or one-party rule" the meeting took place before the coup in Sierra Leone .

## **The United Nations**

In April 1996, the U.N. Commission on Human Rights adopted a resolution in which it requested two thematic special rapporteurs on the independence of judges and lawyers, and on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions to submit a report at the next session of the Commission in 1997 and an interim report to the General Assembly in 1996.<sup>6</sup> Extended negotiations with the Nigerian government for the special rapporteurs to undertake a mission to Nigeria finally collapsed shortly before the 1997 session, due to the Nigerian government's failure to agree to their standard terms of reference.

Despite the Nigerian government's lack of cooperation, the special rapporteurs eventually published a report on the basis of information supplied by other organisations. The hard-hitting report concluded, among other things, that "the rule of law is on the verge of collapse, if it has not already collapsed" and that Nigeria was in violation of a number of its international obligations.<sup>7</sup> The report made a series of recommendations, in particular urging the Commission to appoint of a country specific rapporteur on Nigeria.

On April 7, 1997, the Commission adopted a resolution number 53 of 1997 expressing its deep concern at continuing human rights violations in Nigeria and inviting the chair of the commission to appoint a special rapporteur on Nigeria. Professor Tiyanjana Maluwa, a Malawian based at the University of Cape Town, was initially appointed but later stated he was unable to undertake the workload. Delays in appointing a replacement have reportedly been due to energetic lobbying of the Czech chair of the Commission by the

Nigerian delegation in Geneva, which objected to alternative suggestions put forward by the Western European and Other group at the United Nations.

### **The European Union and its Member States**

By Common Positions of the Council of the European Union dated November 20, 1995, and December 4, 1995, European Union member states agreed to impose visa restrictions on members including civilians of the Nigerian Provisional Ruling Council and the Federal Executive Council, and their families in addition to members of the Nigerian military and security forces and their families, on whom restrictions were imposed in 1993 ; to expel all military personnel attached to the diplomatic missions of Nigeria in member states and to withdraw all military personnel attached to diplomatic missions of E.U. members in Nigeria; to deny visas to official delegations in the field of sports and to national teams; to introduce a prospective embargo on arms, munitions and military equipment allowing existing contracts to be fulfilled ; and to suspend development cooperation except to projects through nongovernmental organizations and local civilian authorities. These sanctions, renewable every six months, remain in place and will be reconsidered and extended or modified in early December 1997.

The ACP-E.U. Joint Assembly at which representatives of the European Parliament and of the African, Caribbean and Pacific ACP Countries meet twice a year has repeatedly adopted resolutions condemning human rights violations in Nigeria and calling on E.U. member states to put pressure on the Nigerian government. In March 1997, after hearing

representatives of exiled Nigerian opposition groups, including Nobel laureate Wole Soyinka and NADECO leader Chief Anthony Enahoro, the Assembly called upon the European Council to introduce an embargo on Nigerian oil. The European Parliament also adopted in November 1996 a resolution supporting an international oil embargo.

The historical relationship between Britain and Nigeria makes the British government stance of particular importance, both bilaterally and in international fora. Following May 1 elections in Britain, and in line with a statement that human rights would be "at the heart" of its foreign policy, the new Labour government immediately began to take a much stronger line on Nigeria than the Conservatives had done, leading the Nigerian government to criticize "hostile and definitely unhelpful" statements by Foreign Secretary Robin Cook.<sup>8</sup> In July 1997, Tony Lloyd, the minister responsible for Africa, commented on the transition program, stating that "the process of establishment of political parties has been so one-sided as to guarantee that there will be one serious candidate ... [resulting in] the transition of General Abacha to President Abacha. We cannot accept that."<sup>8</sup> Britain has strongly supported Nigeria's continued suspension from the Commonwealth, and has also indicated that it has argued within CMAG for the additional sanctions suggested in April 1996 to be imposed, though it did not call for expulsion.<sup>9</sup>

In contrast, a new socialist government elected in France in May 1997 continued to take a conciliatory line towards Nigeria, including ruling out the possibility of excluding Nigeria from playing in the 1998 World Cup soccer tournament due to be held in France

despite E.U. measures banning sporting links . General Abacha attended the December 1996 Francophone summit in Burkina Faso and in January 1997 announced that French would become a second "official language" of Nigeria. The French government has on several occasions granted visas "on humanitarian grounds" to members of the Nigerian government theoretically covered by the ban on visas: it has been reported that the French are planning to oppose renewal of visa restrictions, and possibly other sanctions, when the E.U. Council reviews measures in place in early December 1997. As a result of the softer French line, Nigeria has moved the European office of the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation to Paris from London.

The Dutch government has also faced criticism for allowing a Nigerian delegation entry in March 1997, when the Netherlands, holding the presidency in the E.U., invited Nigeria to attend a meeting in Maastricht of government leaders from the fifteen-member E.U. bloc and its seventy acp partners. The European Parliament objected to the invitation, but the Dutch foreign ministry said that the visa restrictions only applied to "Nigerian authorities traveling to Europe for private reasons." A Dutch spokesman went on to say that the boycott was not intended to hinder important political discussions on the future relations between the ACP and the E.U. The Dutch were of the opinions that "Nigeria is a very prominent member of the ACP group: without Nigeria, the talks between the ACP and the E.U. would be less significant."<sup>10</sup>

## **The United States**

existing restrictions on military links which included the termination in July 1993 of all military assistance and training by banning the sale and repair of military goods. It broadened a pre-existing ban on the issue of visas to senior military officers and senior government officials and their families to cover "all military officers and civilians who actively formulate, implement or benefit from policies that impede Nigeria's transition to democracy," and introduced a requirement that Nigerian government officials visiting the U.N. or international financial institutions in the U.S. remain within twenty-five miles of those organizations. It also stated that it would begin consultations immediately within the Security Council on appropriate U.N. measures.<sup>11</sup> In 1997, Nigeria was once again denied counter-narcotics certification under Section 481 of the Foreign Assistance Act,<sup>12</sup> requiring the U.S. to vote against loans to Nigeria in six multilateral development banks, including the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development and the African Development Bank, and to cease all Foreign Assistance Act and Arms Control Export Act assistance to Nigeria. The government has also cut the U.S. Agency for International Development USAID budget, while reprogramming all USAID assistance exclusively through the nongovernmental sector. Direct flights to Nigeria are banned due to safety concerns about conditions at Nigerian airports.

The U.S. government, both in Washington D.C. and in Nigeria, has repeatedly condemned human rights violations by the Nigerian government, calling in particular for

the release of political prisoners. No further concrete measures to put pressure on the Nigerian government have, however, been adopted or proposed by the administration. At various points during the past year, the Clinton administration has indicated that it is reviewing its Nigeria policy. Thomas Pickering, under-secretary of state for political affairs and a former ambassador to Nigeria, has been charged with this review.<sup>13</sup> No conclusion has been announced yet. It has been stated that the government's commitment to human rights and democracy in Nigeria remained firm; nevertheless, there have been some worrisome indications that the U.S. government might be prepared to make concessions in matters related to human rights in return for access to the Nigerian government to discuss "technical" issues relating to drug trafficking and civil aviation.

Relations between the U.S. and Nigeria hit a low point in September 1997, when armed soldiers and riot police broke up a farewell party being given by Nigerian human rights and pro-democracy groups for outgoing U.S. ambassador Walter Carrington. Carrington had won the admiration of the human rights community for his outspoken stand against the Nigerian government's abuses, and in return the Nigerian government had alleged that he was involved in the series of bombings for which a treason trial against Soyinka and others was instituted in March 1997. These allegations have been angrily denied by the U.S. government, which also protested vehemently at the disruption of the farewell party. Nigerian special duties minister, Wada Nas, chose to blame Carrington for poor relations between the U.S. and Nigeria, commenting that "as we celebrate the end of Mr.

Carrington's four wasted years, we should hope that his unceremonious departure signals the beginning of the task of restoring the good relationship and friendship he has willfully and recklessly destroyed."<sup>14</sup>

A draft "Nigeria Democracy Act" first introduced in November 1995 was re-introduced in Congress in June 1997 by Representative Donald Payne, proposing sanctions beyond those already in place, including a ban on air links and on new investment in the energy sector and a freeze on assets of members of the Nigerian government held in the United States.<sup>16</sup> In September 1997, the House Committee on International Relations held hearings on U.S. policy toward Nigeria.

A number of U.S. cities have adopted resolutions that bar local governments from buying from suppliers with businesses in Nigeria affecting in particular the U.S. oil companies Mobil and Chevron ,<sup>17</sup> and in June a conference of mayors meeting in San Francisco adopted a resolution welcoming such measures in support of democracy in Nigeria.<sup>18</sup> Independent missions to Nigeria by ex-president Jimmy Carter and especially by the American Baptist Convention were heavily criticized by Nigerian human rights groups for taking at face value the government's stated intentions to restore Nigeria to democratic government. A thirty-eight-member monitoring team observing the March 1997 local government elections led by the inaptly named Americans for Democracy in Africa failed to denounce any of the multiple defects of the transition process.

The Nigerian government has continued its efforts to launder its image in the U.S. with a high-profile lobbying campaign. These efforts have included sponsorship of tours by the leaders of the five political parties contesting the transition and by the widows of the four murdered men for whose killings Ken Saro-Wiwa and the eight others were executed.

### **The Organisation of African Unity OAU and its Member States**

African countries remained generally reluctant to condemn Nigeria's human rights record in strong terms during 1997. In October 1996, an OAU spokesperson stated in response to proposals by U.S. Secretary of State Warren Christopher during an African tour that "we have to be very careful about isolating Nigeria," preferring "diplomatic pressures" to sanctions; also in October, an assessment team from the OAU came to evaluate Nigeria's peacekeeping capability.<sup>19</sup> During the OAU summit in Harare in June 1997, Nigeria's internal problems were not mentioned either by OAU Secretary-General Salim Ahmed Salim or by newly elected OAU chair Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe. This reticence may have been influenced by the fact that Nigeria is one of the largest financial contributors to the OAU, while Salim was seeking re-election.

Some African countries maintained close relations with Nigeria: Nigeria and Ethiopia signed cooperation agreements in October 1996, for example; while a high level delegation of Nigerian military officers traveled to Namibia in March 1997 for a one week "familiarization visit."<sup>20</sup> Colonel Mu'ammarr al-Qaddafi of Libya visited Nigeria in May 1997, and was made a Grand Commander of the Federal Republic, Nigeria's highest

honor much to the annoyance of the U.S. government . The outgoing Tunisian ambassador to Nigeria, at a farewell dinner given for him by the Nigerian government, advised the Nigerian government to ignore "the rantings of the West."<sup>21</sup> West African countries, despite their unwillingness to endorse Nigeria's intervention in Sierra Leone, were not prepared to speak out against Nigeria in other areas.

Nevertheless, the intransigent position of Nigeria toward the U.N. special rapporteurs did lead to sufficient irritation among the African group at the 1997 session of the U.N. Commission on Human Rights to bring support even if tacit for the appointment of a country rapporteur on Nigeria, without which the resolution would have been unlikely to pass. Of the African members of the commission, South Africa and Uganda voted for the resolution and the others abstained. African countries also supported the ACP-E.U. Joint Assembly resolution calling for an oil embargo on Nigeria.

At the CHOGM meeting in New Zealand in November 1995, South Africa led the call for strong action against Nigeria; but South Africa's policy toward Nigeria since then, while including expressions of concern at violations of human rights, has generally been conciliatory. South Africa supported the appointment of a U.N. special rapporteur on Nigeria and made some other comments supportive of human rights during 1997. In July, Nigerian Minister of Information Walter Ofonagoro responded by referring to South Africa as "a white country with a black head," accusing unnamed western countries of "driving a wedge" between South Africa and Nigeria in order to weaken the

continent.<sup>22</sup> Yet, though President Mandela called the statement "unfortunate and ill-informed," he appeared to wish to make as little of it as possible, and emphasized instead the "brotherly cooperation" with Nigeria over regional mediation efforts in the former Zaire, stating that he believed that the information minister "may not be aware of the close contact and cordial exchanges that have recently been taking place between him [Mandela] and General Sani Abacha."<sup>24</sup> Ofonagoro later claimed to have been misquoted by the press. In September 1997, Nigerian Foreign Minister Tom Ikimi met with Mandela and delivered a private letter from Gen. Abacha; South African Deputy President Thabo Mbeki is scheduled to visit Nigeria in turn. The negotiations are rumored to be in connection with the possible release of some political prisoners in Nigeria in advance of CHOGM.

The African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights the human rights organ of the OAU finally sent a fact-finding mission to Nigeria in March 1997, having originally resolved to do so in December 1995. The mission took place while the U.N. special rapporteurs were negotiating their own entry to Nigeria ultimately unsuccessfully ; but, in contrast to the U.S. special rapporteurs, the Commission did not itself insist on any terms of reference. It did not, for example, visit any of the political detainees held by the Nigerian government other than the "Ogoni 20," and it did not individually interview these detainees in private. The mission agenda was organized by the Nigerian government, and its members were much criticized by Nigerian human rights

organizations for failing to allocate sufficient time to meet with human rights and pro-democracy groups to obtain information about human rights abuses. The mission did not submit a written report to the next session of the Commission in April, although one was expected at the following session, in November 1997.

### **Other Countries**

Nigeria has compensated for its diplomatic isolation from the west by increasing its links with other "pariah" countries. In May 1997, Minister of Information Walter Ofonagoro stated: "The sooner the West reverses the current trend the better for them because we are moving to China and other nations for support," adding that "we believe everything is planned racial prejudice against Nigeria."<sup>24</sup> Delegations from China have visited Nigeria several times over the last year and signed cooperation agreements in several areas, including the oil industry, following other trade agreements signed in 1995 and 1996; China is reportedly engaged in rehabilitating of Nigeria's railway system. The North Korean vice-premier stated in March that his country was impressed with the "steady implementation of the transition program," and pledged continued support.<sup>25</sup> Chief of Defense Staff Maj. Gen. Abdulsalam Abubakar visited China and North Korea in August 1997, exploring possibilities of military cooperation and arms deals.<sup>26</sup>

In June, Nigeria was one of eight Islamic countries meeting in Turkey to form the "D8," or group of eight developing countries, signing the "Istanbul Declaration," which defines a broad area of economic cooperation.<sup>27</sup> Turkey's Islamist prime minister, Necmettin

Erbakan, had visited Nigeria in October 1996. In May 1997, the Iranian chargé d'affaires in Nigeria urged the Nigerian government "not to yield to the pressure and blackmail of western imperialism."<sup>28</sup>

A number of significant contracts have recently been awarded to Israeli companies, and the Israeli ambassador to Nigeria announced in March that "Israel is convinced that the transition program is very much on course and that sanctions are unnecessary. Washington cannot enthrone democracy in Nigeria because their action is not in consonance with the desire of the Nigerian people."<sup>29</sup>

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## CHAPTER FOUR

### CONSEQUENCES OF SANCTIONS ON NIGERIA DEVELOPMENT AND GROWTH

The imposition of Sanctions on Nigeria during the Abacha regime marked one of the most decisive turning points in the country's post-independence economic trajectory. Sanctions though often deployed as a tool of international Diplomacy tend to reverberate most significantly in the domestic political economy, where they undermine growth, distort markets, and weaken long term development strategies. Nigeria whose economy in the 1990s relied heavily on crude oil exports, foreign investment and external credits, became an ideal case through which we understand the debilitating consequences of Sanctions on State behavior and developmental outcomes. The Sanctions imposed on Nigeria under Abacha, especially after the execution of the Ogoni activist Ken Saro-Wiwa and his colleagues in 1995, revealed the fragility of the Nigeria economy and highlighted the interconnection between governance, international relations and economic progress.

Sanctions imposed on Nigeria were multifaceted, ranging from travel restrictions and suspension of international loans to arms embargoes and withdrawal of foreign aids. The United States, the European Union, and the Commonwealth Of Nations were at the forefront of these measures, largely as a reaction to the regimes authoritarian tendencies, gross human rights abuses and its disregard for democratic transitions.<sup>1</sup> While the direct

intention of these Sanctions was to exert pressure on the Abacha government to reform politically, the unintended consequences was that they significantly constrained the country's access to international financial systems and development assistance. The suspension of Nigeria from the Commonwealth of Nations in tandem with asset-freezes and diminished trade partnerships undermined foreign investor confidence and deepened the country's economic isolation. <sup>2</sup>

Because Nigeria's economy was already burdened by structural inefficiencies, corruption and poor management of oil revenues, the imposition of sanctions had especially severe consequences: they aggravated those pre-existing weaknesses, triggered a decline in foreign direct investment, reduced access to multilateral development financing, and weakened prospects for bilateral economic cooperation<sup>3</sup>

The World Bank and the International Monetary Fund suspended new lending and technical-assistance programmes for Nigeria, a decision which directly undermined infrastructure investment, the delivery of social services and the renegotiation of the country's debt obligations.<sup>4</sup> The World Bank and the International Monetary Fund suspended new lending and technical-assistance programmes for Nigeria, a decision which directly undermined infrastructure investment, the delivery of social services and the renegotiation of the country's debt obligations.<sup>5</sup>

Beyond macroeconomic figures, the Sanctions had far reaching social consequences that fed into the broader dynamics of under development. The suspension of aid and technical

corporation limited access to health, education, and poverty alleviation programs that had been partly funded by external partners. Ordinary Nigerians bore the greatest burden of the sanctions: unemployment climbed, the informal economy expanded, and real wages eroded further in the face of mounting economic hardship.<sup>6</sup> Imports restrictions and trade barriers also fueled scarcity and inflation, leaving basic commodities beyond the reach of many households. This while Sanctions were aimed at the regime the lived realities of their economic impact were most pronounced among the wider population, contributing to growing discontent and exacerbating poverty levels. These Sanctions did not just go operate in a vacuum; they interacted with domestic government failures and entrenched corruption. The regime of Sani Abacha orchestrated massive looting of public resources, diverting billions of dollars into private offshore accounts and thereby deepening the financial pressures caused by the sanctions.<sup>7</sup> This dual impact which is international isolation on one and kleptocratic governance on the other produced a compound crisis that severely impeded Nigeria's prospects for sustainable growth and development during the period. While sanctions may have triggered the economic downturn, the government's failure to offset their impact or channel resources into productive investments was equally pivotal in deepening the crisis.<sup>8</sup>

Nigeria's trade relations were among the first to feel the impact of international Sanctions. The country had long relied on exports of crude oil, which accounted for over 90 percent of its foreign exchange earnings.<sup>9</sup>

Although a full oil embargo on Nigeria was contemplated for states labelled as pariahs, the resulting damage to reputation and the increasing reluctance of international actors to engage with the Sani Abacha regime narrowed Nigeria's bargaining scope and discouraged certain foreign partners.<sup>10</sup> Moreover, the 1995 suspension of Nigeria from the Commonwealth of Nations carried more than diplomatic weight: it also disrupted trade ties with major commercial partners such as the United Kingdom and Canada, who had long been among Nigeria's most significant economic allies.<sup>11</sup> This political isolation reduced opportunities for trade corporation, restricted access to new markets and reinforced the perception of Nigeria as a high risk economy.

In addition to oil exports non oil trade was significantly hampered, Sanctions restricted access to export financing and trade credits , making it difficult for Nigeria businesses to import essential raw materials and intermediate goods needed for manufacturing.<sup>12</sup> imports restrictions imposed by Western nations further complicated Nigeria's ability to engage in reciprocal trade, limiting opportunities for diversification of the economic away from oil dependency. The collapse of industrial productivity not only reduced Nigeria's capacity to generate exportable goods but also increased reliance on imports, worsening the balance of payments crisis and pushing the economy into deeper vulnerability.

“Although sanctions played a triggering role, the broader deterioration of the investment environment manifest in diminished investor confidence, declines in portfolio inflows

and long-term direct investment, and rising concerns over political instability, weak property rights and the reputational risks of engaging with a sanctioned regime was equally instrumental in deepening the crisis.<sup>13</sup>

The suspension of new loan agreements by institutions like the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund deprived Nigeria of vital investment financing for infrastructure and development projects.<sup>14</sup> Similarly, multinational firms outside the oil sector in telecommunications, agriculture and manufacturing scaled back or postponed planned investments, awaiting greater clarity about Nigeria's political future and the risks of doing business with a sanctioned regime.<sup>15</sup>

Even Within the oil sector, traditionally the most resilient to political shocks, Sanctions contributed to a climate of uncertainty. While oil exports continued, the lack of fresh investments in exploration and refining infrastructure created long-term problems for the sustainability of Nigeria's Petroleum industry. Joint ventures with multinational oil companies were strained as firms faced pressure from their home governments and civil society groups to limit collaborations with the regime.<sup>16</sup> This constrained access to new technology, limited capital inflows into the sector, and prevented Nigeria from fully exploiting its vast reserves at a time when global oil prices were volatile. The long-term implications of this underinvestment would later manifest in the persistent infrastructural deficits that continued to undermine Nigeria's oil sector well into the 2000.<sup>17</sup>

Nigeria exclusion from key investments forums and suspension of aid packages deprived the country of opportunities to integrate into the evolving global economy. While many African countries were beginning to harness the benefits of globalization in the 1990s such as rising capital flows and deeper integration into global value chains Nigeria's pariah status kept it largely on the sidelines of these developments.<sup>18</sup>

The loss of foreign aid and technical cooperation which often served as catalysts for private investment, compounded Nigeria's isolation.<sup>19</sup> During the 1990s sanctions era, one of the clearest indicators of Nigeria's economic distress was the deceleration of GDP growth: the country averaged only about 1.5 % growth annually between 1993 and 1998, while its population was rising at nearly 2.8 % per year.<sup>20</sup> This disparity meant that the country's per-capita income was effectively in decline, causing living standards to worsen. According to World Bank data, Nigeria's GDP per capita fell from around US \$1,200 in the mid-1980s to under US \$350 by the late 1990s.<sup>21</sup> The stagnation of growth in part reflected the collapse of investors confidence due to sanctions, as well as broader structural weaknesses in the economy. The trade sector also endured substantial setbacks. While oil exports remained the principal source of Nigeria's foreign earnings, the oil-price volatility of the 1990s combined with reputational risks tied to sanctions curtailed the country's ability to fully capitalise on export revenues. For example, although oil made up over 95 % of export earnings, Nigeria's total export revenues dropped from about US \$12.4 billion in 1992 to approximately US \$8.2 billion in 1995.<sup>22</sup> This decline

was partly linked to reduced trade financing and the reluctance of Western firms to expand commitments.

The trade sector also suffered heavy losses. Although oil exports remained Nigeria's primary source of foreign-exchange earnings, the oil-price instability of the 1990s together with reputational damage from sanctions hampered the country's ability to extract full benefit from those exports. For example, while oil comprised over 95 % of export earnings, Nigeria's total export revenues decreased from about US\$12.4 billion in 1992 to around US\$8.2 billion by 1995.<sup>23</sup> According to United Nations Conference on Trade and Development UNCTAD , Nigeria's foreign direct investment inflows dropped from about US \$1.7 billion in 1993 to under US \$600 million by 1996, a decline of more than 60 %.<sup>24</sup>

Much of this decline was attributed to Western firms freezing new projects and financial institutions halting new loans. Portfolio investment was similarly affected as Nigeria was virtually excluded from global capital markets. By the mid-1990s Nigeria had effectively lost access to regular World Bank IBRD lending and to much concessional financing from international institutions; the Bank publicly treated Nigeria as not creditworthy for IBRD assistance after 1993, and multilateral assistance only resumed after the 1998–99 transition, a loss of concessional and regular lending that worsened the country's capital shortfall and increased reliance on volatile oil revenues.<sup>25</sup> By 1993 Nigeria's inflation rate

was already about 44 %. Over the following years it surged to nearly 73 % before falling to around 10 % again by 1997, following significant monetary adjustments.<sup>26</sup>

The inflation surge was partially driven by shortages of imported goods due to trade restrictions, currency devaluation, and fiscal mis-management by the regime. The rise in inflation eroded real wages and purchasing power, pushing many households into poverty. By 1996, according to a World Bank assessment, roughly 70 % of Nigerians were living below the national poverty line, up from about 43 % in 1985.<sup>27</sup>

Employment data from Nigeria during this period reflect the destructive impact of sanctions and economic downturns. Formal-sector jobs shrank as industries shut down or operated well below capacity hampered by raw-material import restrictions and limited access to credit. The Nigeria Labour Congress reported widespread layoffs in the mid-1990s, and the unemployment rate was estimated to exceed 20 % by 1996.<sup>28</sup> Industrial-capacity utilisation in Nigeria collapsed from an average of about 40 % in 1992 to barely 30 % by 1996, signalling a sharp contraction in productive economic activity.<sup>29</sup> The naira's exchange rate against the US dollar worsened considerably from about N22 per US\$1 in 1992 to more than N84 per US\$1 by 1998.<sup>30</sup> The devaluation worsened the cost of imports and heightened inflationary pressures. Meanwhile, Nigeria's external debt surged to over US\$28 billion by 1998, as sanctions obstructed debt-rescheduling agreements and exacerbated the debt crisis inherited from the 1980s.<sup>31</sup> Social-sector indicators also exposed the direct impact of sanctions: constrained health and education

expenditures, because of shrinking revenues and halted external aid. As a result, Nigeria's adult literacy rate stagnated at around 55 % and life-expectancy fell to roughly 47 years among the lowest in sub-Saharan Africa.<sup>32</sup>

At more than 90 deaths per 1,000 live births, the infant-mortality rate underscored the deterioration of healthcare delivery during this period in Nigeria.<sup>33</sup>

These figures suggest that sanctions not only weakened the macro economy but also eroded human development leaving lasting scars on Nigeria social fabric.

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## CHAPTER FIVE

The case of Nigeria under General Sani Abacha's regime 1993–1998 provides a critical framework for examining how international sanctions influence state behavior and regime resilience. During this period, Nigeria faced international isolation due to widespread human rights violations, suppression of democratic freedoms, and the execution of pro-democracy activists, including Ken Saro-Wiwa. The response from the international community, particularly the Commonwealth, the European Union, and the United States, took the form of diplomatic and economic sanctions aimed at pressuring the regime toward reform. However, Nigeria's experience revealed the complexity of using sanctions as tools of international diplomacy.

One major lesson from Nigeria's experience is that sanctions, though symbolically powerful, often fail to yield immediate political transformation. Despite widespread condemnation and restrictive measures, the Abacha regime maintained its grip on power until the dictator's sudden death in 1998.<sup>1</sup> Sanctions created diplomatic pressure but did not weaken the regime's domestic control mechanisms or compel democratic reforms in the short term. This suggests that sanctions alone, without complementary diplomatic or internal engagement, may not suffice to drive rapid political change.

Nigeria's experience further demonstrates that sanctions tend to disproportionately affect the population rather than the ruling elite. Economic restrictions and the withdrawal of international aid deepened Nigeria's economic hardship, driving inflation and

unemployment.<sup>2</sup> Meanwhile, those in power exploited illicit trade networks and state resources to maintain their wealth. The unintended consequence was that sanctions, rather than empowering citizens, worsened their socio-economic conditions a recurring challenge in global sanction regimes.

Rather than destabilizing Abacha's rule, sanctions initially strengthened his internal legitimacy. The regime used Western sanctions to propagate a narrative of neo-imperialism and external hostility, rallying nationalist sentiments to justify repressive policies.<sup>3</sup>

Sanctions are most effective when combined with sustained diplomatic dialogue and support for domestic civil society.<sup>5</sup> In Nigeria's case, the eventual transition to civilian rule was not the direct result of sanctions alone but rather a combination of internal resistance, advocacy by pro-democracy movements, and continued engagement from international actors after Abacha's death.

### **Implications for Future International Relations and Global Governance**

Nigeria's experience calls for a re-evaluation of sanctions as tools of coercive diplomacy. While they serve moral and political purposes, their humanitarian consequences raise ethical questions.<sup>4</sup> Future sanctions must be better tailored focusing on targeted financial and diplomatic measures rather than broad economic restrictions that harm civilians.

The Abacha experience emphasizes that unilateral sanctions rarely succeed. A unified front anchored in multilateral cooperation is critical.<sup>5</sup> The involvement of regional institutions such as ECOWAS and the African Union can lend legitimacy and enhance enforcement, while also ensuring sanctions are contextually sensitive

Regional organizations have proven instrumental in sanction enforcement and mediation. ECOWAS's engagement in Nigeria's crisis demonstrated how localized approaches can complement global efforts.<sup>6</sup> Strengthening regional governance frameworks will be essential for future crises, enabling early intervention and preventing escalation. Sanctions should be integrated within broader strategies that promote human rights and democracy through positive incentives.<sup>7</sup> Support for civil society, democratic institutions, and human rights defenders should accompany punitive measures. The Nigerian case shows that isolation without engagement risks entrenching repression.

### **Recommendations for Policymakers and International Organizations**

Future sanctions should prioritize individual measures asset freezes, travel bans, and restrictions on luxury goods directed at those responsible for human rights abuses, rather than blanket economic restrictions.

Sanctions should complement, not replace, diplomacy. Continuous dialogue, mediation, and governance support programs can make sanctions more effective and humane.

International institutions should strengthen collaboration to prevent sanction evasion. The United Nations, African Union, and other regional bodies must coordinate policies and monitor humanitarian outcomes.

Sustainable democratic reform must come from within. Thus, the international community should fund and protect civil society organizations that advocate for justice and accountability.

Regular assessments should be conducted to measure humanitarian and economic effects.<sup>9</sup> This will help policymakers recalibrate sanctions when necessary, ensuring that they remain proportional and justifiable.

Nigeria's experience under the Abacha regime offers enduring lessons on the complexity of using sanctions as instruments of international relations. While sanctions served as a moral and diplomatic statement against repression, their limited effectiveness underscores the need for better design, coordination, and integration with broader diplomatic strategies. The lessons learned call for a reimagined approach one that balances justice with compassion, and coercion with engagement. For the international community, the Nigerian experience stands as both a warning and a guidepost: sanctions must be smarter, fairer, and rooted in a genuine commitment to human dignity and democratic governance.

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