



Congressman Donald Payne

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Payne Calls for US Support of Nigerian Democracy and Development

Congressman Donald M. Payne, Chairman of the Subcommittee on Africa and Global Health, recently convened the hearing, "Nigeria at a Crossroads: Elections, Legitimacy and a Way Forward."

"These elections were critical because they marked the first peaceful transfer of power between civilian governments in Nigeria's history," Payne stated during the hearing. "This year's elections were very disappointing. Far from improving on the 1999 and 2003 elections, the 2007 elections were worse. Charges of corruption, vote buying, vote rigging, lack of transparency and other voting irregularities abound."

As a country of regional and international importance, Nigeria's continued democratization and development are of the utmost importance. Through the Economic Community of West African States and the African Union, Nigeria has provided peacekeeping troops for missions in Côte d'Ivoire, Darfur, Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone. In 2003, Nigeria also had a hand in restoring law and order in São Tomé and Príncipe.

Currently, it has the second largest economy in Africa. As the continent's largest producer of oil and as the third largest oil supplier to the United States, Nigeria generates over \$47 billion/year in oil and gas revenue. It is also the largest beneficiary of US investment on the African continent.

However, approximately 70% of Nigerians live on less than \$1 a day and the average life expectancy is only 47 years. In the Niger Delta region of the country, economic, environmental and human rights degradation are commonplace despite the fact that the region produces over 75% of the country's oil.

Representative Payne asserted, "Nigeria is a nation we simply cannot ignore, especially at this critical juncture in time. I would like to see the United States dedicate resources to not only electoral reform but also to varied sustainable development efforts. I look forward to working alongside the Yar'Adua government to promote good governance, transparency and accountability. Nigeria can do better and must do better."

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