



Nigeria's April 14 and 21, 2007 Elections

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Dr. Pastor, distinguished speakers, and honored guests, I am pleased to talk to you today about U.S. policy towards Nigeria's April 14 and 21 elections.

First, however, I want to offer a sense of scale. Nigeria is twice the size of California with a population equivalent to that of Russia. One in five Africans is a Nigerian. With the second largest GDP in Africa, Nigeria possesses a stark dichotomy of wealth and poverty. Despite its tremendous oil wealth and large infusions of donor resources, Nigeria arguably is worse off now statistically than what it was over thirty years ago. Development assistance flows to Nigeria are less than one percent of Nigeria's GDP. The challenges of Nigeria are real and, while considered daunting by some, they can be addressed and resolved. A strict "top-down, outside-in" approach to development has not worked in the past, and I see no reason why it would work in the future. The solution to these challenges does not reside in Washington, Paris, London or Beijing but rather in the cities, towns and villages of Nigeria. That is why these elections are so important.

We are working with the Nigerian people, their government and our international development partners in an effort to build and sustain a politically stable, democratic, well-governed Nigeria—a Nigeria that will respond to the needs of its people and conduct itself responsibly in the international system.

Nigeria is a strategic partner for the U.S. It is a crucial regional power broker, and has played a useful role in dealing with African institutions and in resolving armed conflict. It is a vital player in the War on Terror. Located along the Sahel, Nigeria exerts great influence on African political, economic, and socio-cultural trends. Nigeria is our largest African trading partner, and an important source of oil. A prosperous Nigeria is vital to Africa's growth and stability, and to projecting U.S. influence as a strategic partner.

U.S. policy objectives in Nigeria—which conform to the established goals of the Government of Nigeria—are to enhance Nigeria's ability to deliver social services; strengthen democracy, pluralism, and good governance; promote a more market-led economy; and to enhance Nigeria's capacity as a responsible regional and trade partner. Support for professionalism in, and reform of, the security services is integral to this strategy.

Nigeria has played a major role in advocating peace and democracy. Through diplomatic interventions bilaterally, through the African Union, and through the Economic Community of West African States, Nigeria has helped resolve political disputes in Togo and Liberia, and it helped broker a ceasefire and initiate a negotiation among contending forces in Côte d'Ivoire. Nigeria continues to provide troops for peacekeeping operations in Liberia and Sudan. With the United States as a witness to facilitate implementation, Nigeria signed an historic border agreement with Cameroon in New York last June. Nigeria has withdrawn its troops and met its obligations so far under the agreement. Last March, Nigeria also facilitated the transfer of former Liberian president Taylor to the custody of the Special Court of Sierra Leone.

Now Nigeria faces a set of elections in April that will define that country's political landscape well into the next decade. The success of these elections is vital to the continued democratic development of Nigeria, and of keen interest to the United States. The orderly transition from one civilian government to another is a key milestone in the development of democracy. We applaud the Government of Nigeria's repeated public commitment to hold timely, free and fair elections on April 14 and 21. The integrity of the 2007 electoral process is the most immediate issue of concern to Nigerians and to the international community. Publicly and with over \$15 million in direct resources over the past three years, the United States supports the Government of Nigeria's efforts to hold credible, timely elections, leading to an historic transition from one civilian president to another on May 29.

While the holding of legitimate, credible, and peaceful elections is a challenge, we are confident in the will of the Nigerian people to create acceptable results. Nigeria possesses a strong constituency for peace and democracy. In a victory for democracy, rule of law, and separation of powers, the Nigerian legislature rejected a constitutional amendment for an executive "third term."

From local-level initiatives to state-organized and regionally-organized efforts, individuals, organizations and government institutions are working tirelessly to develop such a democratic society. Nigeria's Electoral Commission also has a critical role to play in ensuring transparency and rule of law, as well as preventing electoral violence. A legitimate, credible, and peaceful electoral process will further strengthen political legitimacy.

We are actively engaged with the rest of the international community to assist the Nigerian electoral process. We are part of a Joint Donor Basket Fund that has recently disbursed \$5 million to 15 Nigerian civil society groups. The \$15 million in electoral assistance that I mentioned before focuses on strengthening the capacity of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) to manage and administer elections; on strengthening civil society engagement in voter education and elections observation; and on working with political parties to enhance professionalism aiming to increase transparency, and reduce electoral violence. In the end, however, the real burden lies upon the Nigerian government and people. We recognize the real challenges involved in conducting elections in a country like Nigeria, but want to keep working with the Nigerian people and government and our international partners, to achieve the best elections possible and continue to move the democratic process forward in Nigeria.

Regardless of the outcomes of Nigeria's April 2007 elections, we must face the fact that forces resistant to change will continue to attempt to hinder progress. The government's institutional foundations have been hollowed from decades of neglect and corruption and will continue to make the country susceptible to recurring crises in the coming years. The Federal Government has been unable to stem rising lawlessness and insecurity in its oil-producing region, and the Nigerian population is increasingly demoralized from worsening living conditions. We have often said that the greatest obstacles to Nigeria's advancement are deeply entrenched poverty and unemployment (which breeds disaffection in youth and Islamic extremism), continued pervasive corruption, ineffective governance, and the integrity of the 2007 electoral process. Decades of unaccountable rule have eroded health and education infrastructure, failed to adequately address the growing HIV/AIDS threat, suppressed democratic institutions, and stifled job creation. Of course, major political unrest in Nigeria would threaten other countries in the region.

I can assure you that the United States is committed to a strategic partnership with Nigeria. Consequently, we believe that helping to build Nigeria's capacity to govern itself transparently and democratically is the key to achieving our mutual goals. Our tactics must focus on carefully targeted areas, to encourage and leverage significant private and other public sector initiatives, and to catalyze Nigerians' efforts on their own behalf. Together, we hope that a pragmatic strategy for Nigeria—one that is heavily reliant on the Nigerians' own capacity and willpower—can serve as a pillar for all of sub-Saharan Africa.

Thank you.

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