



## **TRANSITION MONITORING GROUP**

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### **HUMAN RIGHTS STILL A MIRAGE IN NIGERIA**

*A Press release by the Transition Monitoring Group on to commemorate  
the 2004 International Human Rights Day*

The 10<sup>th</sup> of December, which represents the International Human Rights Day is to the Transition Monitoring Group a day of reflection and soul searching to determine how much has been covered towards building a nation that not only professes to promote the respect of the rights and fundamental freedoms of the citizens, but also acts in a manner that is consistent with the true spirit of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and that of the Nigerian constitution.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights represents the ultimate resolve by people of the world to create the means for the expression and enjoyment of their fundamental freedoms and rights yet these rights, even as sacrosanct as they may be are still wantonly being denied to so many people around the world with women constituting the greatest victims of such abuses.

The Nigerian human rights record since the advent of the current democratic government cannot be said to have scored any appreciable result in the promotion and protection of the rights and fundamental freedoms of Nigerians, rather it has flagrantly encouraged their abuse.

The various crisis that have engulfed the nation, ranging from the Niger Delta crisis, to the crisis in Kano, Numan, Jos, Anambra and so many more which led to the breach of peace and consequently the rights and freedoms of Nigerians to freely live and co-exist have all been the result of the ineptitude of the government to protect the rights of citizens. This is evidently so because apart from the state of emergency declared in Plateau state, no body has been directly or indirectly reprimanded on account of such breaches. The Anambra crisis for which the culprits are well known have

never for one day been reprimanded yet Nigerians particularly women have through these crises been subjected to all forms of violence, ranging from rape, torture and forced displacements.

The media, which represents a cardinal institution in any democratic society cannot be said to have enjoyed much freedom as contemplated by the constitution or the UN declarations on media practice. It would be recalled that in September this year operatives of the State Security Service broke into the office of a media out fit, *INSIDER WEEKLY* and arrested some its staff, for as the government put it “ attacking, disparaging and humiliating” the President and other government agents. This act was a flagrant abuse of the rights of the publishers to freedom of expression.

It is also common Knowledge that through out the year, there have been series of unwarranted arrests and detention of Nigerians who for want of freedom to express their displeasure over certain government actions organized rallies or strike actions. These, the government found distasteful and rather than give an ear to the cries of the aggrieved, invoked the obnoxious Public Order Act to stop such rallies or assemblies and even went on to arrest and detain the leaders of such groups.

Today, like in the days of the military, no Nigerian is ever sure of what may befall him should he or she seek to exercise his or her rights by way of openly expressing a contrary view about government actions or policies. The Police and to a large extent the military have remained a potent tool for government to unleash its wrath on any group that seeks to exercise such rights.

Thus while we celebrate another International Human Rights Day let us be mindful of the fact that, even though we have civilians as leaders the conduct and actions of both the leaders and their agents have not given rise to the free, fair and egalitarian society that was contemplated by the Nigerian constitution. Therefore, it would not be out of place to say that Human rights even though well articulated in the Nigerian constitution is still a mirage in practice.

We therefore call on the security forces especially the police to respect the fundamental rights and freedoms of individuals and institutions that are subject of arrest, detention and prosecution. It is only through unadulterated commitment to, and fidelity to the rule of law and due process that our democracy can flourish.

We also call on the Nigerian government to honour and respect its international human rights obligations by ratifying international and regional covenants and optional protocols that expand the frontiers of human rights enjoyed by the Nigerian people.

More fundamentally, we urge the Nigerian government to pursue economic and political policies that enhances the well being of the Nigerian people as acute poverty is an impediment to the enjoyment of human rights.

Finally, we urge the Nigerian people to remain steadfast in their struggles for a rights based society.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Festus Okoye', with a horizontal line extending to the right.

Festus Okoye (Esq.)  
Chair, TMG  
December 10, 2004