

NIGERIA

The study mission visited Lagos on December 7, 8, and 9, 1965, 38 days before the military coup on January 15, 1966.

Nigeria, ninth most populous country in the world and the most populous in Africa, was considered a center of stability on the continent. Perhaps the best prepared of all the new nations to assume the responsibilities of independence, Nigeria had become a symbol of democracy and sound economic planning in Africa.

The study mission met with the Prime Minister, Alhaji Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, at his official residence on December 8. The President, Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe, who was ill in London at the time, sent his regrets that he could not be present.

The Prime Minister discussed at length the problems of Nigeria and of Africa. He talked freely of the internal political problems stemming from the recent elections. He had a deep understanding and appreciation of the tribal and religious rivalries in the federation. He emphasized, however, that he felt the current situation was greatly exaggerated by the press.

(The study mission inadvertently became involved in this crisis in Lagos while en route to the airport. A small mob of hooligans, while staging a riot and attacking all oncoming vehicles with stones and machetes, assailed an embassy car carrying some members of the mission. It was a frightening experience, but damage was not great and no physical injuries were suffered. The incident made it apparent that the situation was far more serious than perhaps the Prime Minister himself or members of the U.S. mission and local foreign sector realized.)

The Prime Minister, in discussing the Rhodesian crisis, stated that the matter was in an extremely confused state following the meeting of the Organization of African Unity in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, the previous week. He expressed the hope that a meeting of the Commonwealth Ministers might be held to give further consideration to the Rhodesian question. (Prime Minister Balewa was instrumental in arranging the meeting of the Commonwealth Ministers in Lagos on January 11 and 12, 1966, which granted Great Britain more time to end the rebellious regime in Rhodesia through economic sanctions.)

The Prime Minister discussed U.S. assistance to his country and expressed appreciation for it. He felt education and training were of primary importance for the development of his country because of great need for experts in all fields. He stated the Peace Corps had played an important role in this area. However, he looked forward to the day when Nigeria would no longer need external assistance as his people became trained and equipped to take over the direction of the nation's economic as well as political life.