

File D.1.1 SPDC General

MOST CONFIDENTIAL CODED

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NIGERIA UPDATE

DISCUSSION WITH THE BRITISH HIGH COMMISSIONER 6TH APRIL, 1995

Wetherill case

I mentioned that we had decided to inform W and his parents of the probability of him being charged with the murder of his wife, via his lawyer, in order to avoid him or his parents hearing of this through the grapevine, and to break the news to him in stages so as to avoid any unfortunate over-reaction (there have been fears that he might try to commit suicide).

I reconfirmed our previous understanding that the British Government would handle the informing of the parents in the UK when the charges were formally laid.

The BHC will only send someone down to see Wetherill when he is formally charged, relying on us for support as we are doing in the meantime.

He is concerned at the publicity that the case may raise, and the potential mischief that might be done by the media, or the government.

Relationships between Britain and Nigeria

Relationships have been a bit rocky recently, with the Head of State being very upset at the UN attempt to vilify Nigeria for its human rights record recently in Geneva (I have reported this elsewhere already).

However, this seems to be receding into the background, and apparently the Hansard of the House of Lords debate sent to Abacha recently seems to have helped to bring things back on an even keel. (Can someone try and get me a copy of this?)

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Done

Confidential

A 002945

Masefield told me that Callahan, who is a friend of Obasanjo, called Abacha, and that they spoke for 2 hours on the matter of releasing him for the recent conference in the UK on foreign policy. Masefield made the point that in spite of the problems he felt that Britain had a greater capacity to get "in" than any other government at present. The Americans, Germans and the French seem to be having a harder time.

Recent article in "Today" Newsheet from Abuja

We discussed this scurrilous report (sent to you earlier this week) at some length and I told the BHC that we were considering asking them to print a retraction etc. However, the BHC said that the paper didn't seem to be regularly printed and that any retraction might therefore come too late to be of much benefit.

I mentioned my concern that Shell seemed to be the victim of attack from indeterminate quarters near to and probably also in government and asked if he had any intelligence on this. He however could not add any light.

Cash calls

I informed him of the current improved situation, and of the pressures on wages.

Saro Wiwa's Trial

The BHC believes that although the charges should not stick the government will make sure that he is found guilty. He would then be sentenced to death, and reprieved after giving in to pressure from outside, but be incarcerated for a very long time.

The feeling is that this trial by Tribunal will go the way of all others of the kind in the past here: nobody has ever been found innocent. Hence those around Saro Wiwa are using all methods to try and influence this.

Owen Saro Wiwa

Owen Saro Wiwa (Ken's youngest, of 5, brother) has been to see the BHC and apparently expressed a strong wish to see me.

I told the BHC that I might be prepared to meet him on an informal basis to see what he had to say, and the BHC suggested that he introduce me to him during the Queen's Birthday celebrations at his house later this month.

I also made the point that, so long as the MOSOP leadership keep the claim for compensation against us we would find it impossible to deal with them formally. I also said that I will not become involved in Saro Wiwa's trial in any way.

There is still a strong belief amongst these people that we Shell have the power to get Abacha to let Saro Wiwa off! Would that we had such power, we certainly would not have had the cash calls problems if we had!

Visits with Abacha

We discussed the problem we had had in getting in to see Abacha, and the BHC confirmed to me that the HoS gets very angry when he hears from a visitor who eventually gets through to him that he has been held back by his entourage.

I told him of my efforts to see Abacha through Alhaji Aminu Wali.

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Shonekan/Chalker meetings

Shonekan and Linda Chalker are old buddies from UAC days here and they are apparently meeting frequently in London. Clearly S is an emissary of Abacha and is being used to try to soften some of the negative image he is generating.

We should try and get to see Shonekan. He is also involved in the Economic Summit next month, and I would hope to have the opportunity to see him in the lead-up to that, when he gets back here.

He seems to get in to see Abacha with ease, and might be an avenue for us to see him.

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END