

the release of "individuals who have been imprisoned without due process or for political reasons."

The release this week of nine prisoners is a start. Let's hope Nigeria's new leader continues to implement policies that move the country in the right direction.

Nigeria's people deserve no less.

Mr. President, I ask to have printed in the RECORD a New York Times piece from June 17, 1998, that presents an excellent overview of the reaction inside Nigeria over Abubakar's actions.

The article follows:

[From the New York Times, June 17, 1998]

FOR NIGERIA'S LEADER, OFFENSE IS THE BEST DEFENSE

(By Howard W. French)

From the moment Gen. Abdulsalam Abubakar was selected last week to succeed the late ruler, Gen. Sani Abacha, Nigerians began speculating whether a reformist era might be at hand after years of ruinous dictatorship. After all, General Abubakar was long reputed to be a prim professional among Nigeria's politicized and immensely rich generals.

With his order on Monday to release a core group of the country's best-known political prisoners, including an internationally respected former head of state, General Abubakar sent the first clear signal of his intention to bring about an overhaul in the way his country is run, and more than that, conveyed a sense of urgency in the matter.

Though the general's position is precarious, Western diplomats and Nigerian analysts say he has decided to move decisively and not wait to consolidate his power. To delay, they say, would risk falling victim to powerful enemies at opposite extremes of his country's no-holds-barred politics.

"General Abubakar had no choice but to move forward if he wanted to salvage his country and protect himself," said one Western diplomat. "To have postponed making difficult decisions about democracy and prisoners, or to defer the issue of a transition to civilian rule, would have been to play the game of his enemies. The army would have devoured him itself, and failing that there would have been a major risk of a civilian uprising."

On one side, General Abubakar faces his own army, an institution whose top officers have grown fat on years of power, and many of whose younger leaders have climbed the rungs of power awaiting their turn at the trough.

As army chief of staff, General Abubakar had no direct command over the mechanized units that typically determine who holds or takes power in the country. Moreover, the new head of state had none of the huge personal wealth of his predecessors, having avoided the kinds of army jobs that allow top brass to dole out lucrative contracts to other officers, siphoning off kickbacks and purchasing staff loyalty.

On the other side, Nigeria's large and well-developed opposition was emboldened by the death of General Abacha, who had a reputation as the most iron-fisted leader his country of 105 million people had ever known.

And because General Abacha and his military predecessors had so regularly flouted their pledges to restore democracy or arrange a transition to civilian rule, General Abubakar could promise little that would make a dent in the distrust of a hardened political class.

For many veterans of Nigeria's democracy movement, the only acceptable tactic is to take on the army head on, and with the army divided, they feel the future is now.

People both inside the army and out say that General Abubakar's best hope—and decisive test—of engineering a transition to civilian rule is to work with the man believed to have won the country's only democratic election, in 1993, Moshood K. O. Abiola. The last military Government annulled the vote and threw Mr. Abiola in jail, where he remains.

In this scenario, General Abubakar would involve Mr. Abiola in negotiations aimed at easing the military out of power, in much the same way Nelson Mandela helped work out a soft landing for South Africa's apartheid rulers before his release from prison in 1990.

It is too early to say whether this hope will come about in Nigeria, and many hurdles remain.

General Abubakar's first gesture upon taking power, in an unusual post-midnight swearing in ceremony less than 24 hours after General Abacha's death, was to commit himself to his predecessor's previously declared but widely discounted deadline for an Oct. 1 handover to an elected civilian government.

Experts on the Nigerian military say that this pledge was intended more as a bid to outflank the army, whose powerful factions are known to oppose any democratic change, than as an effort to placate a deeply skeptical civilian opposition.

The new leader's second hurdle, these experts say, was to prevent a showdown with pro-democracy groups sworn to carry out a series of protests linked to the fifth anniversary last Friday of the elections apparently won by Mr. Abiola, a millionaire businessman from the south.

The opposition ignored calls to cancel Friday's demonstrations, but security forces were relatively restrained in putting the protests down, marking a sharp turn from the wanton brutality of the Abacha years.

With the threat of strife defused, General Abubakar then freed the former head of state—a retired general, Olusegun Obasanjo—and seven other prominent prisoners, buying international praise and a more forgiving attitude from the opposition.

"A clash between an overzealous army and the June 12 protesters would have badly undercut Abubakar," said Walter Carrington, a former American ambassador to Nigeria. "The restraint that the army showed and the subsequent release of the prisoners suggests strongly that the new leadership has gained control over hard-liners in the army. What we will likely see now is a progressive release of more and more political prisoners."

By far the country's most important political prisoner is Mr. Abiola, the jailed presidential candidate. And ultimately, both the opposition and much of the outside world's judgment of General Abubakar will depend on his handling of Mr. Abiola, whose claim to the presidency is considered by most to be legitimate.

Whatever the opposition demands now, almost no one in Nigeria expects the military to simply surrender power. For one thing, Nigeria's military high command is dominated by northerners, including the new head of state himself, who after years of control are wary of an outright takeover by southerners.

Still, for many in the south, and beyond, no credible election in Nigeria can be organized until the nation comes to terms with the cancellation of Mr. Abiola's mandate.

Regional and ethnic antagonisms like these could scuttle any negotiated arrangements with Mr. Abiola. But many Nigerians suspect that discussions may already be under way to secure his release in a negotiated framework, providing him some recognition and perhaps a large role in transi-

tional arrangements while keeping the field open for other candidates in a fresh election.

"There is no point in pretending that Abiola didn't win an election any longer," said one senior Nigerian military adviser who spoke on condition of anonymity. "What will have to be worked out is an arrangement with Abiola that allows the country to move forward."●

TRIBUTE IN HONOR OF ROGER WOOD, WOKQ NEWSCASTER

● Mr. SMITH of New Hampshire. Mr. President, I rise today to pay tribute to Roger Wood, an institution in the broadcast community of New Hampshire. After 18 years as a radio reporter in New Hampshire, and 30 years in broadcasting, Roger will sign off at the end of this month to pursue other endeavors.

Roger, 50, is the news and public affairs director at WOKQ radio in Dover, New Hampshire. WOKQ is one of the largest stations in New Hampshire and, with its country music format, is my unequaled favorite. I am a WOKQ listener not only for the playlist, but because of the outstanding commitment, dignity and character that Roger Wood has brought to the airwaves in my years as an avid listener.

Roger's distinguished voice has broadcast the news to WOKQ's audience since 1979. Before that, Roger was a one-man news shop at WHEB AM/FM in nearby Portsmouth, and worked at a variety of Seacoast stations including WWNH in Rochester, WBBX in Portsmouth and New Hampshire Public Television. He also worked at a number of stations in his native Pennsylvania before he graced the Granite State with his presence in 1970.

Roger was never one to "rip and read." He always researched stories thoroughly, went the extra mile to get an interview, and provided in-depth coverage from both a human interest and hard news perspective. And he has the awards lining his walls that prove it.

Roger Wood is committed to his profession. He has won recognition from UPI, AP, the New Hampshire Association of Broadcasters, and other organizations in the categories of outstanding reporting, best newscasts and individual achievement. He has said that one of the achievements that most touched him was his coverage in 1986 on the fatal launch of the Space Shuttle Challenger, with New Hampshire teacher Christa McAuliffe on board. Roger was at Cape Canaveral in person, and has said the implications of the explosion left him "deeply moved."

Although Roger Wood is a veteran newscaster, he is a trend setter for the new generation of broadcasters. He led WOKQ to an innovative partnership with Channel 7 in Boston, establishing the largest news exchange network in the region. He has also implemented the first cellular car phone reporting system in the region, for listeners to report accidents and news "they see happening."

Roger is committed to his community, as exemplified by involvement in the Seacoast Housing Partnership, a nonprofit organization dedicated to affordable housing issues; the Mayor's Blue Ribbon Committee to improve the environment of Pierce Island; the Greater Seacoast Economic Summit; and his volunteer work to help many local citizens in poverty.

Most importantly, Roger is committed to his family. He and his wife, Elaine, have been married for 27 years. They have three grown children, Roger, Jr., Emily, and Melissa. His family can be very proud of his achievements, and glad that they will finally have him around for breakfast!

My interviews with Roger always left us sharing a laugh and, though he rarely took any of my suggestions for use in the "Joke Du Jour," his resulting stories were always fair, thorough, and forthright as is always Roger's style. As he embraces future endeavors in the field of communications and public relations, I wish Roger Wood all the best. I am proud to represent him in the United States Senate, and proud to call him my friend.●

EDWARD LELACHEUR

● Mr. KERRY. Mr. President, today I want to call the Senate's attention to Representative Edward LeLecheur and his long history of service to the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. The citizens of Massachusetts have benefitted from his many years of service and legislative leadership. Representative LeLecheur has distinguished himself as a community leader, an elected official and a family man.

Edward LeLecheur started out as the proprietor of Stolphine's Market in Lowell, MA. This small grocery store is located in the part of Lowell known as the Sacred Heart, named for the nearby Catholic church. Ed expanded his role in the community by running for and winning elected office in 1975. Since then, he has served the eighteenth Middlesex District for twenty-three years in the same way he served Stolphine's customers: one at a time, with integrity, dedication, and compassion.

Representative LeLecheur's giving spirit has manifested itself in a variety of ways. He drives physically challenged people to the Registry of Motor Vehicles, and purchases turkeys at Thanksgiving and Christmas time which he then delivers door-to-door. Those same people, and countless others, enjoy the baseball stadium which Representative LeLecheur helped bring to Lowell. Due to Ed LeLecheur, our national pastime is now part of the ongoing revitalization of Merrimac Valley, bringing prosperity and entertainment to families from all the surrounding communities.

As a member of the Ways and Means Committee for the past twelve years and as the current chair of the Committee on Personnel and Administration, Representative LeLecheur has

also extended his spirit and service beyond his district. The state has been well served as a result of his leadership.

Representative LeLecheur has been successful not only as a state representative, but also as a family man. He and his wife Eileen were married on June 4, 1947, more than fifty years ago. Together they raised six children and are today the proud grandparents of ten grandsons and granddaughters.

Mr. President, I would like to thank him for his tireless devotion to his constituents and neighbors. Representative LeLecheur is an inspiration to all of us who work for positive change in our communities. I wish him and Eileen the very best as they embark on this new chapter in life.●

U.N. WORLD DAY TO COMBAT DESERTIFICATION AND DROUGHT

● Mr. FEINGOLD. Mr. President, I rise today to mark the United Nations World Day to Combat Desertification and Drought, which took place on June 17, 1998. This date is important because it is the fourth anniversary of the United Nations General Assembly's adoption of the Convention to Combat Desertification in Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, Particularly in Africa. The United States has signed this treaty, but the Senate has yet to exercise its advice and consent responsibilities on this important convention.

The World Day to Combat Desertification and Drought should serve as a reminder to this body that we should honor our constitutional responsibilities and act on this convention in a timely manner. As the ranking member of the Subcommittee on African Affairs, I have had the opportunity to see first-hand how valuable the provisions of this convention will be to the people of Africa. It is a mechanism by which the people of Africa will be assisted in preserving and protecting their land, which is a vital link in Africa's fight to become self-sufficient.

This convention is particularly important for Africa because more than two-thirds of the land comprising that continent is desert or dry land, and almost three-quarters of the dry land used for farming is in danger of becoming unusable. The Sahelian droughts of 1971-73 and 1984-85 contributed to the deaths of thousands and spurred migration that put further stress on already taxed land around Africa.

This Convention to Combat Desertification, which has already been ratified by 120 countries, establishes a framework to promote land and soil health in developing countries, in order to halt the kind of neglect that eventually leads to land that is unusable for farming. This convention is innovative because it requires participation from all segments of the population, from the farmers and herders who work the land, to local governments and envi-

ronmental organizations, to those who affect environmental and agricultural policy at the national and regional levels.

I hope that the Senate will act on this convention in a timely manner, and that next year's anniversary of the Convention to Combat Desertification will be marked by progress in the world's efforts to protect the land and soil that sustains life in developing countries.●

NATIONAL DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION ACT FOR FISCAL YEAR 1999

Mr. COCHRAN. Mr. President, I call for the regular order.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report S. 2057.

The assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

A bill (S. 2057) to authorize appropriations for the fiscal year 1999 for military activities of the Department of Defense, for military construction, and for defense activities of the Department of Energy, to prescribe personnel strengths for such fiscal year for the Armed Forces, and for other purposes.

The Senate proceeded to consider the bill.

Pending:

Feinstein amendment No. 2405, to express the sense of the Senate regarding the Indian nuclear tests.

Brownback amendment No. 2407 (to amendment No. 2405), to repeal a restriction on the provision of certain assistance and other transfers to Pakistan.

APPOINTMENTS BY THE VICE PRESIDENT

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Chair, on behalf of the Vice President, pursuant to 22 U.S.C. 276h-276k, as amended, appoints the following Senators as members of the Senate Delegation to the Mexico-U.S. Interparliamentary Group Meeting during the Second Session of the 105th Congress, to be held in Morelia, Mexico, June 19-21, 1998: the Senator from Kansas (Mr. ROBERTS) and the Senator from Alabama (Mr. SESSIONS).

EXECUTIVE SESSION

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

Mr. COCHRAN. Mr. President, in executive session, I ask unanimous consent the Indian Affairs Committee be discharged from further consideration of the nomination of Michael Trujillo to be Director of the Indian Health Service Department of Health and Human Services.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. COCHRAN. I further ask unanimous consent that the Senate immediately proceed to its consideration and further ask consent that the Senate also proceed en bloc to the consideration of Calendar No. 625. I finally ask consent that the nominations be confirmed, the motions to reconsider