

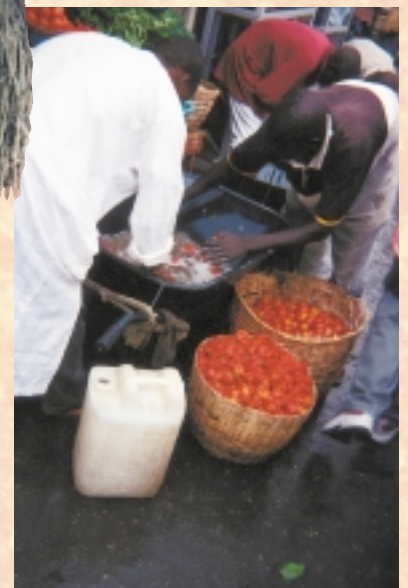


Notes from Nigeria

John Berry and Judge William Wagner conducted a series of U.S. Justice Department sponsored training workshops for Nigerians at the Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offenses Commission in Abuja, the capital. Although corruption is a deeply rooted and pervasive problem in Nigeria, the leader of the country President Olusegun Obasanjo, has firmly declared his intention to wage war against it. He signed an anti corruption law in June 2000 and inaugurated an independent commission to investigate and prosecute a variety of corruption cases.

The commission also acts to identify and root out practices that facilitate corruption. A public awareness and education campaign is also part of the commission's responsibility. The giving and taking of bribes is so widespread in Nigeria that many people consider it to be socially acceptable.

The anti-corruption commission is trying to change this mindset by popularizing slogans that urge people not to accept bribes. Another popular slogan in the country is "There is enough for your need but not for your greed." The Nigerian Justice Minister Kanu Agabi has been quoted as saying that a whole generation of Nigerians has been corrupted and it will take time to eradicate this scourge, but he is hopeful because a start has been made and there's progress, even if it's slow.



Fifty percent of the population is Muslim and forty percent is Christian, mostly Roman Catholic. Ten percent are animists. The Muslims dominate the north and the Christians, the east. The division between the northern Nigerians and the other tribes has been a constant source of friction and intertribal fighting. The country's history is marked by civil wars, lawlessness, and dictatorships.



Nigeria is a country with a population of 120 million people. A parliamentary democracy, this West African nation gained independence from Britain in 1960. The lawyers of Nigeria are at the center of a monumental effort to build a society based on the rule of law.



The rule of law and the importance of judicial and lawyer integrity is well understood by those Nigerians who are working to rid the country of all forms of corruption. Berry and Judge Wagner were very impressed with their hopes and their courage. Both men came away from the trip with an even greater appreciation of the role competent and ethical lawyers and judges play in establishing a democracy under the rule of law.

For democracy to work in a republic, its citizens must never forget that "freedom and justice come with a price—the price is personal responsibility," said Judge Wagner. "In developing democracies that price is sometimes a high price. Thus, although the Nigerian constitution clearly contemplates that those elected to represent the people shall be accountable to the people, the people, just as here in the United States, must live up to their responsibility of actually holding those elected accountable and requiring that they govern with integrity, and according to law."

Judge Wagner, who has also served the U.S. government as a diplomat in Liberia, observes that "whenever good people committed to the rule of law join together to fight the evil of corruption, seeds are planted, relationships are formed, and the love of liberty catches fire."



Over 250 ethnic groups live in Nigeria. However, three distinct groups dominate—the Hausa in the north, the Ibo in the east, and the Yoruba people in the west. The country's major industries are crude oil, natural gas, coal, palm oil, peanuts, and cotton. The United States is a major trading partner.



Ibrahim J. Pam, John Berry, Mrs. Habiba, and Judge William Wagner