

VISIT TO NIGERIA

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INTRODUCTION

I had 4 reasons to go to Nigeria

- **The priority the government places on progress in Africa** – and the centrality of Nigeria to the prospects of Africa as a whole. My visit was in response to the request from The Prime Minister that all ministers strengthen their links with Africa and participate in the Commission for Africa which he has established and which will report in 2005.
- **The importance of legal issues for underpinning democracy and development.** As Solicitor General and one of the government's Law Officers I was able to work on issues of tackling human trafficking, international drug trafficking and fraud, and promoting access to justice in a fair and efficient legal system.
- **The importance of the Nigerian community in my constituency of Camberwell and Peckham.** We have the largest Nigerian community in Europe and they play a full role in the life of the borough of Southwark. I wanted to strengthen my links with the Nigerian community by visiting their country of origin.
- My concern to promote the **equality of women** and their participation in politics.

Involving the Nigerian Diaspora in Southwark

Prior to my visit I held a consultation meeting of my Nigerian constituents to discuss issues they wanted to bring to my attention. I'd like to thank all 73 who came to this meeting to give me their views – they gave me excellent insight into what to look out for whilst in Nigeria.



Above: With Nana Amamoo of African Families Foundation, Sabina Emmanuel, Amos Akin Adeniyi-Adejinmi of Nigerian British Community Forum, Richard Taylor and some Nigerian drummers welcoming people to the briefing meeting

Left: Consulting my Nigerian constituents prior to my visit.

Tackling Human Trafficking

There is evidently deep concern in Nigeria about trafficking. It takes the form of young women being tricked into going with the trafficker for “a hairdressing job in Milan” or “a job in a bar in Rome”, or “a waitressing job in an African restaurant in France”. They are then forced into prostitution either in the country they are taken or to another European Country, the USA or Canada. This is nothing less than modern day slavery. There is clearly a commitment in Nigeria to face up to this ugly trade – and not to remain in denial. They have already agreed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Italian Government of mutual work to tackle human trafficking and we agreed in principle that we would enter a UK/Nigeria Memorandum of Understanding which I hope to sign with the Nigerian Attorney General shortly. The issue of trafficking is not only high on the agenda of women members of the legislative assemblies but also the focus of concern from the Vice President’s wife, Her Excellency Hajiya Amina Titi Abubakar who established WOTCLEF (Women Trafficking and Child Labour Eradication Foundation) which is geared towards the eradication of modern slavery of women and children. WOTCLEF aims to 'Restore Human Dignity' in those who have had theirs forcibly taken away from them while enlightening others about the dangers that trafficking poses. As well as passing a new law, the Trafficking in Persons (Prohibition) Law Enforcement and Administration Act 2003, the Nigerians have established an agency, the National Agency for the Prohibition of Traffic in Persons and other Related Matters.



Mrs Titi Abubakar, Richard Taylor, and children who had previously been trafficked at the WOTCLEF Centre in Abuja

Legal reform and access to justice is essential to underpin democracy and human rights. This is of concern both in the South of Nigeria and also in the North, whose law is based on Sharia. The Northern state of Jigawa, for example, is working to improve access to the law in remote rural communities and in particular for women to get their legal rights, by establishing a Women's Research and Legal Advice Centre in Dutse, which I opened during my visit. This is supported by the British Council Security Justice and Growth programme. The women I met there said most of the issues of concern to women arose from marital disputes, particularly domestic violence, child custody, maintenance and property rights.



The Women's Research and Legal Advice Centre in Dutse, Jigawa State, Northern Nigeria

It is a major disincentive to the investment from overseas which is so crucial for development if a country lacks an effective, fair and efficient legal system for resolving disputes. The Nigerians are embarking on a major process of reform including attempts to secure the integrity of the judicial system and computerisation to ensure effective case management, speed and openness in the High Court in Lagos (*pictured right*) This is being funded with support from DFID and the British Council.



Women striving to increase representation in State Assemblies and the Federal Assembly

There remain major obstacles to women's participation in legislative assemblies. Women Politicians told me these include attitudes such as

“only loose women go into politics”

“if a woman is in politics her husband must have lost control of her”

“if a woman goes into politics her home life will come under the public spotlight”

“Nigerian constituents expect to come to the MPs house at any time of the day or night and the family then complain”

“if a woman marry a man from a different state she has no right to stand for election there but nor can she stand in their own state as she no longer lives there.”

“going into politics in Nigeria is very expensive and women don't have the money”

But despite this there is a vibrant group of Nigerian women determined to make their mark in their assembly, to work with other women and to bring new women forward. The British Council and DFID do important work helping them network and make progress.

There is also a vibrant non-governmental organisation sector of women's groups concerned with issues such as trafficking, domestic violence, access to justice and women's participation in politics. They too, receive support from DFID.



Above: The Women's Parliamentary Forum in Abuja



Right: A discussion with Women's Rights Groups in Lagos

Young people and HIV/ Aids

There is still controversy in Nigeria about whether the issue of the transmission of HIV through sexual activity should be directly addressed or whether instead chastity and abstinence should be promoted. The policy of the Federal government and the network of community, youth and health NGOs is to tackle the issue openly. At CATS (Community Action Through Sport) a Lagos-based out-of-school sports project for young people, I saw the message about HIV avoidance through the use of condoms, playing a central part of their programme with the young people.



*The Community
Action through
Sport Project in
Lagos*

At a village of 5,000 people that has grown up around lorry drivers stopping overnight on their way north of Kano, I saw the work of “peer educators” amongst the sex workers enforcing the “no condom – no sex” policy in the brothels used by the truckers. There I met peer educators, other sex workers and their clients.



*The new
Community
Clinic at the
roadside
“village” that
has grown up
on the truck
route north of
Abuja*

Visit Programme : Abuja, Kano, Jigawa and Lagos

MONDAY 4 OCTOBER – ABUJA

Arrive Nnamdi Azikiwe Airport, Abuja
Meeting with Chief Akinlolu Olujimi SAN,
Attorney-General
Meeting with Mohammadu Lawal Uwais, Chief
Justice
Meeting with Broderick Bozimo, Minister of Police
Demographic Health Survey Briefing - DfID
Visit to WOTCLEF Centre – Human Trafficking
Organisation

TUESDAY 5 OCTOBER – ABUJA

Meeting with Nuhu Ribadu (Economic and
Financial Crimes Commission)
Visit to Abuja Visa Section
Official opening of Women's Parliamentary Forum
Meeting with Bukhari Bello, Human Rights Commissioner
HIV/AIDS Briefing and visit to village outside Abuja
Roundtable on Justice Sector Reform

WEDNESDAY 6 OCTOBER – NORTHERN NIGERIA

Arrive Kano Domestic Terminal – drive to Dutse,
Jigawa State
Meeting with Deputy Governor of Jigawa State
Official opening of the Women's Research and Legal
Advice Centre
Visit Community School in outskirts of Kano
Roundtable on Women's Rights under Sharia
Visit British Council



On a beach in Lagos



With the Governor of Lagos

THURSDAY 7 OCTOBER – LAGOS

Visit to Kano market
Depart Kano and fly to Lagos
Tour of Lagos Courts with Judges
NAME Meet Lagos Governor and Solicitor-General
Visit to Community Action Through Sports (CATS)
Programme, Surulere

FRIDAY 8 OCTOBER – LAGOS

Visit Lagos Visa Section
Discussion with Women's Rights Organisations
Meeting with Dr Bello Lafiaji, Chairman of National Drug
Law Enforcement Agency
Depart Victoria Island for Murtala Muhammad Airport



Left: At the Visa Section in Lagos



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This was my initial visit to Nigeria. I will be visiting the country again because there are further areas that I would like to visit. Although my engagements were extensive, there were many further issues that I will be looking into in more detail such as the oil in the Delta, how this operates and who benefits from it and the integrity of the political system generally. **If you have any comments on these or any further issues, please do not hesitate to contact me at the House of Commons, London SW1A 0AA, on 020 7210 4218 or at harmanh@parliament.uk**