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## Interview: Baba Gana Kingibe

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# We are doing what is best for our country, and nobody will stop us

*Nigerian Foreign Minister Kingibe was interviewed for EIR on July 3 by Lawrence Freeman and Uwe Friesecke. The following is a somewhat abbreviated version of that interview.*

**EIR:** Russia right now has an economy that is collapsing at a very rapid rate—the result of the collapse of communism and the imposition of International Monetary Fund (IMF) shock policies. How do you see this development in Moscow now, and what do you think its impact will be on the rest of the world?

**Kingibe:** Whether in Africa or in the former Soviet Union, you are not just dealing with one problem at a time. You are not dealing with political adjustment and then economic adjustment—you are dealing with all forms of evolutionary adjustments at the same time, all of which are impacting the individual and society at large. There is some element of recognition on the part of the West, on the part of the international financial institutions, that they ought to soft-pedal on Russia and they ought to space out the adjustment period. There are a lot of carrots being dangled. We wish we would have similar carrots being dangled for all our pains. We are just told that this bitter pill is good for you. If you say it is bitter, there isn't even the effort to give a little bit of sugar-coating.

It is in the interests of the West, it is in the interests of the world, that there is a stable Russia, that there is a stable eastern Europe, as they try to adjust their economies. I don't think the West can afford to push too hard in this process, in the light of difficulties which the Russian people have. A sensitive, flexible approach is in the interest of the international community, and I think they are taking such approaches.

There is a general "humbug" feeling by those of us weaker nations about all this. At the same time we are being clobbered for some transgression, somebody else is being mollycoddled for the same transgression. Take the question of China and the approach to China. China flatly refuses to take anybody's prescription, but is instead going at its own pace in the light of its own self-interest.

**EIR:** Nigeria was under the IMF Structural Adjustment

Program for a number of years in the 1980s, and the current government which you are part of has taken certain actions to maintain the economy and restrict some of these policies. How do you see these changes?

**Kingibe:** Everything happens within the context of time and other events. When this present government came into office in November of last year, it was in the wake of some eight years of this painful adjustment process. This process was very badly applied and inconsistently pursued in Nigeria. So we compounded the pains that naturally come with the most perfect adjustment procedure anyway. We came into office at the time, within the context of a particular political upheaval—great social discontent, dilapidation of services and infrastructure—and there was the need to blunt some of the very sharp edges of the on-going policies, especially in terms of their implementation. . . .

So, really, all we tried to do with the monetary policies the government put in place [in December 1993], is to plug the loopholes for abuse. The two major crimes that we are supposed to have committed were to peg the exchange rate at one rate, 22 naira to the dollar, and close all the windows for abuse, and to give a range beyond which the interest rate should not fluctuate. Now these were absolutely essential. We were in a situation where interest rates, lending rates, were getting up to 80%! There is no honest business or productive activity you can undertake that's going to enable you to service your debt at an 80% interest rate and make profit, and make savings for more investment.

Of course, one understands that western economies are settled enough for slight variations in interest rates to make an impact, a quarter up, a quarter down. However, as underdeveloped as we are, we really feel that we do need to get a hold on these undisciplined and varying interest rate charges which banks use.

As for the exchange rate, it is very clear that the *bureaux de charge*, the black market, were nothing but avenues for money laundering, and for shuttling paper around in order to create the illusion of wealth, not backed up by any real production. So we are trying to see if we can channel resources, channel capital and so on to productive sectors, and close the loopholes for abuse. It is a temporary measure; it is a flexible measure; nothing is fixed in stone. We do

hope to adjust as we go along, to fine-tune, and let's see how far that takes us down the road.

It's a pity, the *reaction* of the international financial institutions and western governments, Paris Club, London Club. It is not one of saying: "Look, what you are trying to do will not work; we understand your problem, what about this alternative way of dealing with the abuses you are trying to deal with?" No. It was instead: "You have been given the tablet, why don't you follow it; you are deviating, and therefore you should be clobbered; you should pay for this." This is not a healthy approach; it is an approach of the diktat regime, and, psychologically, people are just not prepared for it.

**EIR:** During the 1970s, there was a great deal of discussion in the Non-Aligned Movement for a New World Economic Order. In fact, the founder of *EIR*, Mr. LaRouche, was involved in that with others. And this led to a discussion of the Lagos Plan for infrastructural projects, so that Africa could use its potential and its wealth to develop. That idea has sort of died out in the 1980s and into the 1990s. What do you see as the potential of reviving that kind of thinking? Do you think that it is possible that could be revived?

**Kingibe:** With all due respect to your founder, I think it is wishful thinking; it is not born out of reality. There is no such thing as a New World Economic Order. Those who have advantage *have* the advantage. We live in a world where there are unequal trade partnerships, where there are inequitable prices for commodities, for raw materials, for finished products; those who have the advantage right now dictate the tune and the pace. Any change must be perceived by them to be in their long-term interest. I think that the kind of process that has ended up with the World Trade Organization is the kind of arrangement that would make those who have the advantage feel that they have thrown some bones at the dogs barking at their heels, but without upsetting their own advantageous position.

There is no new "order" that can be ordered by the underdogs; we negotiate, we try to indicate that it is better for us if societies in the developing world are not pushed to the wall of constant instability and disruption. I think it is in those terms that we can bring up perhaps a more just economic order, than a new world economic order. Maybe I'm cynical.

**EIR:** People around the world have seen the tragedies of Somalia, and now Rwanda. Some people think that the efforts by the West and the U.N. were late and insufficient, and did nothing to help the problem. What do you think solutions would be for those two areas, and future such conflicts, and do you think Nigeria and Ecowas—Western Unity of Africa—could play a role in dealing with these problems?

**Kingibe:** Unfortunately, the problem with the West—may-

be it is because of the democratic nature of western societies and perhaps because of the sophisticated technology that is applied by the media—is that events tend to drive policy. Policy is not formulated for its own sake, on its own merits. Cable News Network or somebody shows you all sorts of horror pictures in Bosnia, or Rwanda, or Somalia, and all sorts of old ladies screaming and demanding that their congressmen or senators or somebody should do something; and they come bearing hard on the Oval Office, and then some gesture is made. Thus, you end up with a very hastily put-together policy.

It always amuses me that anybody should say that they would send troops to a conflict situation, provided that these troops don't sustain any kind of casualties—it doesn't happen. It is obvious that you calculate, and you of course take maximum precautions to assure that your troops don't sustain any casualties, but in the nature of things, in conflict situations, you take casualties as a probability. But you don't, at the death of a soldier, say: "There is danger in this operation; I'm pulling out"—as your chaps did in Somalia. Having lured everybody into the operation, [the United States] led them to the deep end of the river, and sort of ditched them there and walked away.

I think that we are moving toward the right kind of approach to the kind of conflict situations that would inevitably arise. After Rwanda, after Somalia, there will be others. In many ways we have been the precursors of the new way of containing conflicts. In Ecowas, the member states of the economic community of the West African region, put together troops to nip in the bud a situation in Liberia potentially as bad as in Somalia, or in Rwanda—in terms of societal breakdown and in terms of carnage. Our intervention, at a point in time when those who had earlier been *the* natural allies had cut and run, has stabilized, or at least contained the damage, and has done so over time, after a great deal of anguish and some level of limited violence. We do hope that the process now in place has at least given an idea of what regional approaches to resolving these conflicts can achieve.

The situation in Rwanda is—I'm always amused when I see western analyses—that it is very much a regional problem. It is a tribal problem: yes, Hutus and Tutsis. One does see statistics, that the Tutsis make up only 10% of the population in Rwanda and in Burundi too. But then, how many Tutsis are there in the region? You cannot ignore the natural sympathy that the groups in other countries who exert varying degrees of influence on their government, or maybe they are even controlling the governments in these neighboring countries, can bring to bear on this situation in Rwanda. I think whatever you may think of President Mobutu [of Zaire], at least there is a committee of the regional powers under the chairmanship of President Mobutu, who are trying to see if they can bring about some kind of settlement in Rwanda.

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Of course in the African context, it is not every time that the region has the necessary enforcement capacity, of the kind that the French are now trying to show that they have in Rwanda, or of the kind that the United States brandishes on every occasion of this nature. There must be regional solutions to these problems. That approach would localize the problem. The moment you invite extra-regional involvement, your problem is compounded and more complicated. We, Nigeria or Ecowas, can only play a role in our own regional conflicts, provided that others also don't come in and complicate our lives. . . .

**EIR:** In the West, there has been negative publicity about Nigeria. In the United States, this has included accusations that Nigeria has increased its involvement with drugs. How do you see these developments? Are there things which you think western countries should look at more carefully in analyzing the Nigerian situation?

**Kingibe:** One never knows who is in charge of western societies; is it the media or their governments? Certainly the media play a great role. For some reason, the western media, especially American media, have decided that the Nigerian government is a very convenient whipping boy. Of course, that is fueled by the centrality of democratization around the world, in Clinton's own foreign policy agenda, and—would it be fair to say—naive reaction to anything that is a "military regime," without anybody bothering to look at the specifics of any given case. This is combined with, of course, the so-called "findings" about drugs and related matters concerning Nigeria and so on, and then our own economic measures, for the reasons that I've told you, all combined to make us rub America the wrong way. And if you rub America the wrong way, you are rubbing the World Bank the wrong way; you are rubbing the IMF the wrong way. . . .

You have this peculiar institution called Congress in America. For instance, somebody is sitting in the White House and looking at the prospects of safe passage for the health reform bill, wondering if there should be greater understanding of the peculiar circumstances of Nigeria, and a bunch of people calling themselves the Black Caucus are saying, "You must do this and that in Nigeria!" One looks at one's health reform bill; one looks at a place called Nigeria.

People may end up making the easy choices.

We understand this. Basically our own approach is to put our heads down and do the right thing for our country, knowing what we want to achieve. That which we want to achieve is essentially the same as that which we are being cajoled to work toward: democracy. . . . I don't think that adopting the right economic measures is something that you need anybody to tell you, because if you are not following the right course, it will show up in the streets and the marketplace. Your own people will tell you that you are not doing the right thing, and you will have to listen and respond.

As for drugs, it is we who want to eliminate the drug trade. One, it destroys our economy, the money-laundering aspects of it. And secondly, we are not a drug-consuming country. The mere transshipment and transiting activities will create the drug culture in Nigeria, and we want to nip it in the bud. We don't want to have the same kind of problems that you have in the States and in western Europe. It is easier for us to stop it from developing than to deal with it after it has developed. It is in our own interest to do the right things. We plead for understanding, and if it comes, fine. If it does not come, we will just carry on and do the right thing for our people.

**EIR:** Is there anything that you see that the United States could do to help Nigeria get through this present difficult period?

**Kingibe:** As a friend of mine said, in the White House review of U.S. policy on Africa last week, "Nigeria to Africa is like China is to Asia." It is a big country. It has a large population; it has a lot of resources. It would be a mistake to presume that a good cooperative relation between Nigeria and the United States is in Nigeria's interests alone. It should be in the interest of both countries. And it is, therefore, in the interest of the United States to engage Nigeria constructively in dialogue.

What we have seen from the United States since the end of 1993, is constant confrontation. It has a way of turning off people; it has a way of weakening the effectiveness of those who understand America, and of those who are working in the same direction. Internally, it ties the hands of those who would normally be America's friends, because they have nothing to show as benefit in engaging America.

If this persists for too long, the old-fashioned but currently used diplomatic practice of reciprocity could well be put in place. We do hope that it will never come to that. It is time that we begin, that we restore the old, warm, cooperative relationship. It is time to see what we can do for each other; there is *so much* we can do, which is in the interest of our stable international system.

As I mentioned, we have played some role in containing the situation in Liberia from developing into a Rwanda and Somalia-type situation. We have the potential of *carrying the burden of this region*, in terms of stabilizing the societies economically and in other respects. We have always played our part in peacekeeping operations around the world. Communism has not had any foothold here, even when it was under every American's bed, or when everybody was looking for it under their bed. We are a natural ally of the United States, and it is a great pity that we have this terrible passage in our relationship.

**EIR:** One thing that is being discussed in western press, especially in Britain, is the current situation with Chief Abiola. The press says there is a military dictatorship in Nigeria and that Chief Abiola, who claims he won the June 12, 1993 election that was annulled in midstream, is having his human rights violated.

**Kingibe:** Chief Abiola obviously won the elections held on June 12 last year; they were annulled by a government that is two governments removed from this one. They were annulled by the government of General Babangida. It was as a consequence of that action that, first, Babangida involuntarily left office; and that secondly, the makeshift successor, the regime that he put in place, also couldn't hold. Hence, the present government coming into office. Now, this government came into office in order to pick up the pieces of the consequences of that annulment. It [the current government of Gen. Sani Abacha] cannot really—as much as western democracies want this to happen—dictate to the nation what should be. It has come, first, to stop what was the very likely possibility of a breakup of the country. It has come to reconcile communities and to reestablish mutual confidence and trust. And it has come to create a platform that is going to enable the various communities in Nigeria to come together and discuss the problem.

Before this government, the protagonists and antagonists of the June 12 election—whether you are for Abiola or against Abiola—were not talking to each other; they were barking at each other. And now they are talking to each other!

In this process, whatever the people decide through their elected representatives in the constitutional conference, this government has said: "So be it." Maybe the problems are not just, "Abiola won: let him take over government." Maybe the problems are more fundamental. If they are more

fundamental, discuss what these fundamentals are, but come to some conclusion that is going to enable this country to move forward, having learned the appropriate lessons from this bitter experience.

I know that at every stage, there has been cynicism and disbelief, about what we said we were going to do. This has been understandable to some extent. Their experience during the Babangida regime was that everything that they believed and swallowed—hook, line, and sinker—turned out not to be so.

So, Nigerians are exercising appropriate caution, perhaps. But I think we have proved our bonafides sufficiently at this point in time. . . . As the head of state has said, just labeling yourself "pro-democracy" doesn't change anything. Being "pro-democracy" is nobody's monopoly. We are all democrats, including the military.

But you must realize that Nigeria is coming to the end of its tether, in terms of how to deal with the West and its attitudes.

And even as foreign minister, I end up saying: "Look, I can only explain so much; I can only appeal that much. My primary constituency is Nigeria, and my primary interest is the Nigerian people, and I think they know what we are trying to do. They accept what we are trying to do; they are cooperating with what we are trying to do." We shall get to the democratic end, to which all Nigerians are committed, and to which all Nigerians are looking forward. And that will be much sooner than those who say that we have a plan to demand internal dissent. . . .

**EIR:** We have been impressed in meeting with Nigerians during this visit, by the enormous potential that Nigeria has—it has the oil wealth, it has the population. If this can be turned into increased economic development, manufacturing, infrastructure, industrial development, Nigeria could play a major role in leading Africa. How do you see the future?

**Kingibe:** The world can be as upset as they like with Nigeria, but they should not ignore it. It is a big country. It has about three climatic zones in terms of agricultural production. It has this enormous population; it has enormous resources, above and below ground, and very industrious people. And as developing nations go, very skilled manpower.

We have no desire to lead anybody. What we desire is to improve the quality of life of our people, to develop our country, to provide sophisticated infrastructure and services, and welfare systems. Not in a planned economy, socialistic sense, but that people should have enhanced quality of life, if you like. And we do hope to also take our international responsibilities seriously and to play our part in improving the life and security of our people, around our region, around the continent, around the world.

It is inevitable that we shall do so.