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STATE HOUSE, LAGOS

Nigeria: Int Sit: Aug 79.

6th January, 1984

Her Excellency
The Rt. Hon. Margaret Thatcher
Prime Minister
United Kingdom of Great Britain
10 Downing Street
London SW1

Dear Prime Minister,

Recent events in Nigeria leading to a peaceful change of Government must have evoked different reaction in various places and I thought I should direct this personal communication to Your Excellency in order to acquaint you with the background to the intervention by the Nigerian Armed Forces. Here at home, the situation is well understood and the change of government has been received with the widest acclaim. Even in those circles which, for obvious reasons, stand to lose most through the corrective measures being contemplated to restore the sense of decency and accountability in public life, the smooth take-over and the accompanying calm and general acquiescence has been more than salutary.

When the last military administration voluntarily handed over power to civilians in 1979, it was with very high hopes for the future. The handing over exercise was carefully planned and faithfully executed. The 1979 Constitution was promulgated. There was justifiable optimism that Nigeria was headed for an era of progress, unity and stability, under a free and elected democratic government.

However, so soon after the handing over, in both the Administrative and Legislative organs of Government, a myriad of public functionaries embarked on a systematic circumvention of most of the checks and balances entrenched in the Constitution. Pervasive corruption combined with moral and financial indiscipline to ensure that millions

of Naira were stolen from the national coffers and stacked away in banks inside and outside the country by many unpatriotic citizens actively aided and abetted by certain unscrupulous foreign associates.

What was left was quickly dissipated on loaded contracts and over-invoicing of imports designed to allow generous kick-backs to government and political party functionaries. Approved and correct procedures were systematically undermined and the normal functioning of government machinery deliberately perverted for personal gains. Individuals were becoming increasingly apprehensive of their personal security and the future seemed to hold little hope for improvement in the status quo. The majority of public functionaries, at all levels, freely engaged themselves in irregularities with impunity since those at the top and supervisory grades were themselves known to be involved in corrupt practices and impropriety. Bribes and gratifications were contemptuously demanded and given. Visitors to our country were regularly confronted by the nauseating and ugly sight of uniformed Customs officials and Policemen taking gratifications without qualms and so brazenly doing so.

Incompetence in the management of national resource led the nation to accumulate huge internal and external debts and to run into serious balance of payments difficulties. Government was fast losing its ability to pay for the goods and services contracted or needed. The national economy tottered dangerously on the brink of collapse. Numerous industrial undertakings are at this very moment on the verge of total collapse and many had been forced to close down for lack of raw materials. Thousands of workers have lost their jobs and the sceptre of large-scale retrenchment has already appeared.

The resultant scarcity of essential commodities was predictably accompanied by spiralling inflation. Frauds and embezzlement of public funds were committed with reckless abandon. Hired assassins and marauders were openly beginning to practice their trade in broad daylight. Perpetrators of corrupt practices resorted to arson to cover their trail, resulting in callous destruction of several expensive public buildings and even loss of lives.

Incidents of armed robbery multiplied and the state of general lawlessness heralding a chaotic state of affairs, possibly culminating in a bloody uprising and revolution was most imminent.

The people groaned under the twin yoke of pervasive corruption, skyrocketing prices and general insecurity of lives and property. But the inept and insensitive leadership, chiefly arising out of its own stinking corruption, insensitivity and misplaced sense of duty and responsibility was most ineffective and appeared powerless to carry the fight to the doorsteps of known highly placed frauds, cheats, embezzlers of government funds, big-time smugglers, illegal currency traffickers, law breakers and political thugs sometimes disguised as policemen. They preferred to indulge in criminal waste, ostentation and grotesque display of ill-gotten wealth and ignoring sound, technical advice proffered by professional public servants and many well-meaning individuals to arrest the increasingly worsening economic situation and to deal firmly with corrupt officials and their friends.

Worse still, politicians saw the acquisition of political power as a prerequisite for amassing wealth. Political struggles consequently became a do or die affair. In spite of the huge investment on the 1983 elections, there is ample evidence that they were blatantly rigged all round. In reaction, politically motivated strifes engulfed several parts of the country claiming several lives and destroying valuable property. The overall effect was a serious erosion of national stability. The attributes constituting the role of government were rendered meaningless; and Political Party leaders folded their arms in apparent helplessness, unwilling or unable to deal with the situation. In the circumstances, it would be unpatriotic not to act: something had to give.

Thus, the national economy has been brought to ruin chiefly owing to gross mismanagement. The world recession and the fall in the price of crude oil notwithstanding, our resources, given judicious management, could have better satisfied our needs. We see a need to check the pervasive corruption and the heightened indiscipline and insecurity associated with it. The primary objective for our

intervention is therefore to save the tottering nation from imminent collapse; a patriotic rescue operation.

We are in a desperate economic situation but at the same time are prepared to face up to our problems with seriousness and determination; and with the support and understanding of friendly countries like yours, and in God's name, hope to succeed in resolving some of them now and most in the near future.

Mr. A.L. Ciroma, C.F.R., a retired Secretary to the former Federal Military Government and my special emissary who is leading this delegation to you is in a position to render more detailed briefing on the state of affairs here should further information be needed.

While wishing you a prosperous and peaceful New Year, please accept, Your Excellency, the assurances of my highest consideration and esteem.



MAJOR-GENERAL MUHAMMADU BUHARI
Head of the Federal Military Government,
Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces