

PRESS RELEASE

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**Declaration by the Presidency on behalf of the European Union
on the situation in Nigeria**

The European Union welcomes recent developments in Nigeria. In particular, it appreciates the commitment of the Government to engage in a democratisation process. In this context, the EU welcomes the establishment of a new electoral commission that has already issued the guidelines on the registration of political parties and a detailed timetable for the election process, the first step of which, the preliminary registration of the parties, having just been successfully concluded. We will be prepared to support the elections technically and to send election observers, if so requested by the Nigerian authorities.

The EU also acknowledges the efforts by the Head of State to base the membership of the newly established Federal Executive Council on broad representation from the various regions. We further welcome the publication of the 1995 draft Constitution that had been withheld for such a long time.

The Union recognises the release of a large number of political prisoners during the last months, including the 'Ogoni 20'. The EU expects that those still remaining in detention will also be released in due course, and that Decree No 2 providing for detention without trial, will be repealed. The Union further welcomes the Government's promise to protect the freedom of association and its steps to lift restrictions on trade union activity as well as its decision to readmit the Academic Staff Union of Universities.

The EU also notes promises of the Government to protect freedom of expression, in particular freedom of the press, and acknowledges first steps to reorganise media laws as a concrete follow-up in this regard. The Union hopes that also Decree No 43, obliging print media to renew their registration each year, will be repealed soon.

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In the context of human rights the Union further welcomes the invitation extended to the UN Special Rapporteur on 16 September to visit Nigeria.

The EU encourages the Nigerian Government to continue its efforts in re-establishing a democratic society, characterised by the observance of human rights and based on the rule of law. The EU will continue to further this aim by intensifying the political dialogue which began with the British Minister of State Lloyd's visit to Nigeria representing the EU Presidency, and was continued by visits of Ministers of other EU Member States on a bilateral basis.

The EU calls upon all sectors of Nigerian society to participate in this promising process of democratisation and stresses its readiness to cooperate with all political forces committed to democratic principles, the rule of law and to assist in the building of a civil society.

The Union finally looks forward to the normalisation of relations between the European Union and Nigeria on the understanding that the positive developments in the country will continue. In recognition of specific progress towards democratisation and in response to tangible achievements in Nigeria's transition to civilian rule, the EU stands ready to review its Common Position of 1995 and the sanctions contained therein.

The Central and Eastern European countries and Cyprus associated with the European Union and the EFTA countries, Iceland and Norway, members of the European Economic Area align themselves with this declaration.