

"We are here because you destroy our countries"

speech from the congress **"United Against Deportation"**

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Why we promote the slogan **"We are here because you destroy our countries"** for the 'Caravan for the Rights of the Refugees and Migrants' by **Dr. Anthony Edeh** of the International Human Rights Association - Bremen speech held on Friday 21.4.2000

On behalf of the refugees in Germany, the Human Rights Association in Bremen, the VoiceAfrica Forum in Jena, and all the good people who have been supporting the struggle for the rights of the refugees and migrants, I welcome you all to this refugee congress in Jena. No doubt, I believe that this is already a well known fact, that the situation for the refugees today has been getting worse and deteriorating with every turn of the new laws. Not only that but more and more laws are being passed every day to exclude us from normal German society. More and more measures are put in place, to make it impossible for us to live in Europe. The latests innovation in such attacks is that the policy of exclusion and prevention, is now being organised on a Europe-wide level. As these new measures are being increased and sharpened against us we the refugees are forced inevitably to come together to fight for our rights together.

It was only recently in 1998 through the caravan movement that we refugees for the first time found our voice and started to express ourselves politically. With the slogan we have no vote but we have a voice we travelled through over 44 German cities in 35 days. In this caravan tens of thousands of refugees, men and women were able to come together politically to express their collective determination, to fight for our rights. One cannot over emphasise the fact that the caravan project has helped us in no small way since then to shape our effective basis for refugees and migrants from Africa, Asia, Middle East and South America and German anti-racist groups to come together for a common course.

At a more appropriate time during the course of this meeting we shall endeavor to evaluate what we have already achieved and also articulate new strategies for sustaining and strengthening the caravan project.

Of course there are many reasons for us to rise to the challenges facing us today in Germany and elsewhere in Europe. But before we go deeper into discussing these conditions and articulating our strategies of resistance, it is important that we first and foremost remember why we were forced to flee our countries in the first place. German and European politicians are adamant to deny that there are any justifiable reasons for us to come to Europe. They have invariably argued that Germany has no responsibility whatsoever in the causes of the problems of the world and the economic crisis. Nothing can be further from the truth than such political denials. In fact there is a very direct connection between Europe's multinational and economic political interventions in our countries and the creation of refugees. Cheap oil and gas coming from Nigeria to Europe as a result of the neo-colonial partnership between multinational co-operations like shell and the successful military dictatorships that have ruled and ruined Nigeria for the past 32 years. In 1956 it was western interests that drove the 1966 military overthrow of Nigeria's constitutionally elected government. That coup marked the destruction of post independent democratic measures which had given rights for example to the Ogoni ethnic people in the Niger delta. This systematic destruction of democratic measures and the political and the economic dispossession of the Ogonis paved the way for the ruthless exploitation of Nigeria's oil resources for the past three decades. Today the Niger delta is in flames, while billions of dollars worth of natural wealth has been taken away overseas.

I have concentrated on my own country, but the speakers in this section of the congress will explain not only the situation in Africa but also Asia, Latin America and the Middle East. And as more and more refugees join the Caravan movement we will develop our understanding and will be able to take a political position on other areas of the world.

Most people have heard that Otto Schily the Inner Minister from Germany has embarked on the road to dismantle the asylum rights completely. Otto Schily not only expresses this aim on behalf of the German state he also expresses the general tendency in European politics. Schily's concept is to throw out of the window, all considerations of political persecution and human rights violations as a reason for flight and limit the criteria to enter this country purely to the economic interests of the German state. Ironically, refugees fleeing persecution know very well what happens when the economic interests of countries like Germany are given free reign in their homelands - corrupt dictatorships, terror and persecution of those who try to fight for human and social rights and against the destruction of the environment.

Helmut Kohl, argued that 'yes there are problems in the world' but 'why do refugees have to come to Germany?'. Otto Schily has gone one step further. He argues that asylum laws themselves are outmoded and unnecessary because with neo-liberal economics are accompanied by liberal politics, so he argues that the days of dictatorships and human rights violations are receding.

Our position in this congress is that claims that the neo-liberal economic plans are already producing democratic roots is not true at all. These arguments by the rich countries are being made in the case of Nigeria and it has several objectives. First is to say that there is a new democratic government in Nigeria and therefore everything is going well, so therefore

new investment opportunities are available for rich countries and further refugees do not have to come here from Nigeria. But the recent events in Nigeria points towards the opposite. Not only that the Niger delta crisis is escalating because the multinational countries that suspended their operations several years ago are attempting to come back, other problems, sparking religious conflict are threatening to plunge the country into civil war.

The same arguments are put forward for Iran. Germany is in fact in the leadership of this campaign to put a mask of democracy on the anti-women Islamic fundamentalist regime in Iran. Our comrade from Iran will explain this later today in greater depth. German foreigners police is blatantly collaborating with the anti-women policies of the regime by forcibly putting veils on Iranian women so that emergency passports can be made by the Iranian embassy to enable their deportation. As you know the Iranian Embassy refuses to issue a passport to women who do not wear a head scarf. Again Germany achieves two things. By painting a veil of democracy on the Iranian regime it opens the door for even more massive investment in Iran at the same time deportations to Iran will also increase.

Just as there are two sides to the relationship Germany has to our home countries, - for us refugees too there are two side to our problem and our consciousness. On the one hand we have to struggle against deportation and social exclusion to survive here and deeply connected to this we will express the terrible problems of our brothers and sisters that we have had to leave behind. The German government accuse us of being economic refugees. Maybe this is what they want us to be. It is probably their hope that the few of us who get the right to stay here become integrated into this economic system that destroys our countries. We will not be as they want us to be.

The 'Caravan for the Rights of the Refugees and Migrants' will show what political refugees are capable of.

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