

## **Asset Recovery Project in Nigeria**

### **UNODC**

During the debate of the Second Committee of the General Assembly, at its fifty-seventh session, the representative of Nigeria affirmed that corrupt practices and the transfer of illicit funds had contributed considerably to capital flight . Africa ranked highest in that connection, the representative said, with an estimated \$400 billion or more in funds having been looted and stashed away in foreign countries. An estimated \$100 billion or more of that sum was from Nigeria. He also stressed that, by the account of the Government of Nigeria, the nation's total external debt stood at \$28 billion, approximately 28 per cent of total funds siphoned out of the country.

The late Nigerian dictator Sani Abacha and members of his inner circle looted and exported an estimated \$2.2 billion (some estimates are even higher). Such diversion is particularly troubling in view of World Bank estimates that the entire GDP for the country is approximately \$41.1 billion and that more than two thirds (70 per cent) of the estimated population of 123.9 million people live on less than \$1 a day.

Three years ago, Nigeria had requested for UN assistance in the recovery of stolen assets stashed in foreign countries. The United Nations Convention against Corruption, which was recently opened for signature in Merida, Mexico, established the return of assets deriving from corrupt practices as a fundamental principle. This project is aimed at assisting Nigeria in preventing and combating the transfer of funds deriving from acts of corruption, including the laundering of funds, and in returning such funds.

The recovery of the massive funds that were looted from Nigeria could therefore greatly contribute to providing the urgently needed resources to implement the Government's programme for poverty alleviation and the general economic development of the country.

The project will first assess the institutional and legal control weaknesses that have made possible the massive looting of funds and will then assess the shortcomings of the current efforts to recover these funds. The assessment will focus on institutional, organizational and coordination weaknesses and identify training needs and other capacity building measures.

Based on this assessment, UNODC will elaborate recommendations and conduct a working group meeting of all key stakeholders including the Nigerian Central Bank, the Economic and Financial Crime Commission, the Anti-Corruption Commission (ICPC), the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of Finance, the Code of Conduct Bureau and the National Security Advisor. Based on the findings of the assessment and the recommendations, this group will elaborate a comprehensive recovery strategy, addressing the prevention of "grand corruption," the laundering of its proceeds and the overall capacity to recover such assets.