

# BIAFRA: The Aburi accord

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• **Official record of the minutes of the meeting of Nigeria's military leaders held at Aburi, Ghana on January 4 & 5, 1967.**

**Saturday December 10, 2011**

### **Opening**

The Chairman of the Ghana National Liberation Council, Lt.-General J.A. Ankrah, declaring the meeting open, welcomed the visitors to Ghana and expressed delight that Ghana had been agreed upon by the Nigerian Military leaders as the venue for this crucial meeting. He considered the whole matter to be the domestic affair of Nigeria, and as such, he refrained from dwelling on any specific points. The General, however, expressed the belief that the Nigerian problems were not such that cannot be easily resolved through patience, understanding and mutual respect. Throughout history, he said, there has been no failure of military statesmen and the eyes of the whole world were on the Nigerian Army.

He advised that soldiers are purely statesmen and not politicians and the Nigerian military leaders owe it as a responsibility to the 56 million people of Nigeria to successfully carry through their task of nation building. Concluding, the General urged the Nigerian leaders to bury their differences, forget the past and discuss their matter frankly but patiently.

Lt.-Col. Gowon invited the Nigerian leaders to say a joint thank you to their host, and all said thank you in unison in response to Lt.-General Ankrah's address. At this point the General vacated the conference table.

Importation of arms and resolution renouncing the use of force

Lt.-Col. Ojukwu spoke next. He said that the agenda was acceptable to him subject to the comments he had made on some of the items. Lt.-Col. Ojukwu said that no useful purpose would be served by using the meeting as a cover for arms build-up and accused the Federal Military Government of having engaged in large scale arms deals by sending Major Apolo to negotiate for arms abroad. He alleged that the Federal Military Government recently paid £1 million for some arms bought from Italy and now stored up in Kaduna.

Lt.-Col. Ojukwu was reminded by the Military Governor, North and other

members that the East was indulging in an arms build-up and that the plane carrying arms, which recently crashed on the Cameroons border, was destined for Enugu. Lt.-Col. Ojukwu denied both allegations. Concluding his remarks on arms build-up, Lt.-Col. Ojukwu proposed that if the meeting was to make any progress, all the members must, at the outset, adopt a resolution to renounce the use of force in the settlement of Nigerian dispute.

Lt.-Col. Gowon explained that as a former Chief of Staff, Army, he was aware of the deficiency in the country's arms and ammunition, which needed replacement. Since the Defence Industries Corporation could not produce these, the only choice was to order from overseas and order was accordingly placed to the tune of £3/4 million. He said to the best of his knowledge, the actual amount that had been paid out was only £80, 000. As to why these arms were sent up to the North, Lt.-Col. Gowon referred to lack of storage facilities in Lagos and reminded his military colleagues of the number of times arms and ammunition had been dumped in the sea. This was why, he said, it became necessary to use the better storage facilities in Kaduna. The arms and ammunition had not been distributed because they arrived only two weeks previously and have not yet been taken on charge.

After exhaustive discussion to which all members contributed and during which Lt.-Col. Ejoor pointed out that it would be necessary to determine what arms and ammunitions had arrived and what each unit of the Army had before any further distribution would take place, the Supreme Military Council unanimously adopted a declaration proposed by Lt.-Col. Ojukwu, that all members:

- renounce the use of force as a means of settling the Nigerian crisis;
- reaffirm their faith in discussions and negotiation as the only peaceful way of resolving the Nigerian crisis; and
- agree to exchange information on the quantity of arms and ammunition available in each unit of the Army in each Region and in the unallocated stores, and to share out such arms equitably to the various commands;
- agree that there should be no more importation of arms and ammunition until normalcy was restored.

The full text of the declaration was signed by all members:

The Supreme Military Council, having acknowledged the fact that the series of disturbances since January 15, 1966, have caused disunity in the Army resulting in lack of discipline and loss of public confidence, turned their attention to the

question of how best the Army should be re-organised in order to restore that discipline and confidence. There was a lengthy discussion of the subject and when the arguments became involved members retired into secret session. On their return, they announced that agreement had been reached by them on the re-organisation, administration and control of the Army on the following lines:

- Army to be governed by the Supreme Military Council under a chairman to be known as Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces and Head of the Federal Military Government.
- Establishment of a Military Headquarters comprising equal representation from the regions and headed by a Chief of Staff.
- Creation of area commands corresponding to existing regions and under the charge of area commanders.
- Matters of policy, including appointments and promotion to top executive posts in the Armed Forces and the Police to be dealt with by the Supreme Military Council.
- During the period of the military government, military governors will have control over area commands for internal security.
- Creation of a Lagos Garrison, including Ikeja Barracks.

In connection with the re-organisation of the army, the Council discussed the distribution of military personnel with particular reference to the present recruitment drive. The view was held that general recruitment throughout the country in the present situation would cause great imbalance in the distribution of soldiers. After a lengthy discussion of the subject, the Council agreed to set up a military committee, on which each region will be represented, to prepare statistics, which will show:

- Present strength of Nigerian Army;
- Deficiency in each sector of each unit;
- The size appropriate for the country and each Area Command;
- Additional requirements for the country and each Area Command. The committee is to meet and report to Council within two weeks from the date of receipt of instructions.

The Council agreed that pending completion of the exercise in paragraph 7 further recruitment of soldiers should cease.

In respect of item 3 (b) of the Agenda, implementation of the agreement reached on August 9, 1966, it was agreed, after a lengthy discussion, that it was necessary for the agreement reached on August 9 by the delegates of the Regional Governments to be fully implemented. In particular, it was accepted in principle

that army personnel of Northern origin should return to the North from the West. It was, therefore, felt that a crash programme of recruitment and training, the details of which would be further examined after the Committee to look into the strength and distribution of army personnel had reported, would be necessary to constitute indigenous army personnel in the West to a majority there quickly. Non-recognition by the East of Lt.-Col. Gowon as Supreme Commander 10. The question of the non-recognition by the East of Lt.-Col. Gowon as Supreme Commander and Head of the Federal Military Government was also exhaustively discussed. Lt.-Col. Ojukwu based his objection on the fact, inter alia, that no one can properly assume the position of Supreme Commander until the whereabouts of the former Supreme Commander, Major General Aguiyi-Ironsi, was known. He, therefore, asked that the country be informed of the whereabouts of the Major-General and added that in his view, it was impossible, in the present circumstances, for any one person to assume any effective central command of the Nigerian Army. Lt.-Col. Ejoor enunciated four principles to guide the meeting in formulating an answer to the question of who should be Supreme Commander. There were the:

- a. Problem of effective leadership;
- b. Crisis of confidence in the Army;
- c. Disruption in the present chain of command;
- d. Inability of any soldier to serve effectively in any unit anywhere in the country.

Lt.-Col. Gowon replied that he was quite prepared to make an announcement on the matter and regretted that a formal announcement had been delayed for so long but the delay was originally intended to allow time for tempers to cool down. He reminded his colleagues that they already had the information in confidence. After further discussion and following the insistence by Lt.-Col. Ojukwu that Lt.-Col. Gowon should inform members of what happened to the former Supreme Commander, members retired into secret session and subsequently returned to continue with the meeting after having reached an agreement among themselves.

11. At this point the meeting adjourned until Thursday, January 5, 1967. The

Power of the Federal Military Government vis-a-vis the regional governments

12. When the meeting resumed on the January 5, it proceeded to consider the form of government best suited to Nigeria, in view of what the country has experienced in the past year (1966). Members agreed that the legislative and executive authority of the Federal Military Government should remain in the Supreme Military Council to which any decision affecting the whole country shall

be referred for determination provided that where it is not possible for a meeting to be held the matter requiring determination must be referred to military governors for their comment and concurrence. Specifically, the Council agreed that appointments to senior ranks in the Police, Diplomatic and Consular Services as well as appointments to super-scale posts in the Federal Civil Service and the equivalent posts in Statutory Corporations must be approved by the Supreme Military Council. The regional members felt that all the decrees or provisions of decrees passed since January 15, 1966, and which detracted from the previous powers and positions of regional governments should be repealed if mutual confidence is to be restored. After this issue had been discussed at some length, the Council took the following decisions: The Council decided that:

i. on the reorganization of the army:

a. Army to be governed by the Supreme Military Council under a chairman to be known as Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces and Head of the Federal Military Government.

b. Establishment of a Military Headquarters comprising equal representation from the Regions and headed by a Chief of Staff.

c. Creation of Area Commands corresponding to existing regions and under the charge of Area Commanders.

d. Matters of policy, including appointments and promotion to top executive posts in the Armed Forces and the Police to be dealt with by the Supreme Military Council.

e. During the period of the Military Government, military governors will have control over area commands for internal security.

f. Creation of a Lagos Garrison, including Ikeja Barracks. ii. on appointment to certain posts: The following appointments must be approved by Supreme Military Council:

a. Diplomatic and Consular posts.

b. Senior posts in the Armed Forces and the Police.

c. Super-scale Federal Civil Service and Federal Corporation posts.iii. on the

functioning of the Supreme Military Council: Any decision affecting the whole country must be determined by the Supreme Military Council. Where a meeting is not possible, such a matter must be referred to military governors for comment and concurrence. iv. that all the Law Officers of the Federation should meet in

Benin on January 14 and list out all the decrees and provisions of decrees concerned, so that they may be repealed not later than January 21 if possible;v.

that for at least the next six months, there should be purely a military

government, having nothing to do whatever with politicians. Soldiers involved in disturbances on January 15, 1966 and thereafter

13. Members expressed views about the future of those who have been detained in connection with all the disturbances since January 15, 1966, and agreed that the fate of soldiers in detention should be determined not later than end of January 1967. Ad Hoc Constitutional Conference

14. The Council next considered the question of the resumption of the Ad Hoc Constitutional Committee and the acceptance of that Committee's recommendations of September 1966. After some exchange of views, it was agreed that the Ad Hoc Committee should resume sitting as soon as practicable to begin from where they left off, and that the question of accepting the unanimous recommendations of September 1966 be considered at a later meeting of the Supreme Military Council. The problems of displaced persons

15. The Council considered exhaustively the problems of displaced persons, with particular reference to their rehabilitation, employment and property. The view was expressed and generally accepted that the Federal Government ought to take the lead in establishing a National Body, which will be responsible for raising and making appeal for funds. Lt.-Col. Ojukwu made the point, which was accepted by Lt.-Col. Katsina, that in the present situation, the intermingling of easterners and northerners was not feasible. After each military governor had discussed these problems as they affected his area, the Council agreed:

a. On rehabilitation, that Finance Permanent Secretaries should resume their meeting within two weeks and submit recommendations and that each region should send three representatives to the meeting.

b. On employment and recovery of property, that civil servants and Corporation staff (including daily paid employees) who have not been absorbed should continue to be paid their full salaries until March 31, 1967 provided they have not got alternative employment, and that the military governors of the East, West and Mid-West should send representatives (Police Commissioners) to meet and discuss the problem of recovery of property left behind by displaced persons. Lt.-Col. Ejoor disclosed that the employment situation in his region was so acute that he had no alternative but to ask none Mid-Westerners working the private sector in his region to quit and make room for Mid-Westerners repatriated from elsewhere.

Lt.-Col. Ojukwu stated that he fully appreciated the problem faced by both the Military Governor, West, and the Military Governor, Mid-West, in this matter and

that if in the last resort, either of them had to send the easterners concerned back to the East, he would understand, much as the action would further complicate the resettlement problem in the East. He assured the Council that his order that non-easterners should leave the Eastern Region would be kept under constant review with a view to its being lifted as soon as practicable.

16. On the question of future meeting of the Supreme Military Council, members agreed that future meetings will be held in Nigeria at a venue to be mutually agreed. 17. On the question of government information media, the Council agreed that all government information media should be restrained from making inflammatory statements and causing embarrassment to various governments in the federation.

18. There were other matters not on the agenda, which were also considered among which were the form of government for Nigeria (reported in paragraph 12 above) and the disruption of the country's economy by the lack of movement of rail and road transport which the regional governors agreed to look into.

19. The meeting began and ended in a most cordial atmosphere and members unanimously issued a second and final Communiqué.

20. In his closing remarks, the Chairman of the Ghana National Liberation Council expressed his pleasure at the successful outcome of the meeting and commended the decisions taken to the Nigerian leaders for their implementation. Lt.-Col. Gowon on behalf of this colleagues thanked the Ghanaian leader for the excellent part he had played in helping to resolve the issues. The successful outcome of the meeting was then toasted with champagne and the Nigerians took leave of the Ghanaians.

21. The proceedings of the meeting were reported verbatim for each regional government and the Federal Government by their respective official reporters and tape-recorded versions were distributed to each government.

## **FINAL ABURI COMMUNIQUE**

The Supreme Military Council of Nigeria resumed its meeting in Ghana on the 5th of January and continued and concluded discussion of the remaining subjects on the Agenda. The Council reached agreement on all the items.

On the powers and functions of the Federal Military Government, the Council reaffirmed its belief in the workability of the existing institutions subject to necessary safeguards.

Other matters on which agreements were reached included the following:

- Re-organization, administration and control of the Army
- Appointments and promotions to the senior ranks in the Armed Forces, the Police, Diplomatic and Consular Services as well as appointments to super-scale posts in the Federal Civil Service and the equivalent posts in the Federal Statutory Corporations. On the question of displaced persons, the Supreme Military Council agreed to set up a committee to look into the problems of rehabilitation and recovery of property. In this connection, the Military Governor of the East assured the Council that the order that non-Easterners should leave the Eastern Region would be reviewed with a view to its being lifted as soon as practicable.

Agreement was also reached that the staff and employees of governments and statutory corporations who have had to leave their posts as a result of recent disturbances in the country should continue to be paid their full salaries up to the end of March 31, 1967, provided they have not found alternative employment. The Council agreed that the Ad Hoc Committee on the constitutional future of the country should be resumed as soon as practicable and that the unanimous recommendations of the committee in September 1966, will be considered by the Supreme Military Council at a later meeting.

The Council unanimously agreed that future meetings of the Council should be held in Nigeria at a venue to be announced later.

The entire members of the Supreme Military Council express profound regret for the bloodshed, which has engulfed the country in the past year and avow to do all in their power to ensure there is no recurrence of the unhappy situation.

The members of the Supreme Military Council place on record their profound appreciation and gratitude for the constructive initiative and assistance rendered by the Chairman of the National Liberation Council, the Government and people of Ghana. Statement by the Supreme Council on the Reorganization of the Army, and the Approval of Senior Appointments, and its Declaration on the use of force I. The Supreme Military Council now meeting in Ghana has agreed on the following reorganization of the Army:

- The Army is to be governed by the Supreme Military Council the Chairman of which will be known as Commander-in-Chief and Head of the Federal Military Government.
- There will be a Military Headquarters on which the Regions will be equally represented and which will be headed by a Chief of Staff.
- In each Region there shall be an Area Command under the charge of an Area Commander and corresponding with the existing Regions.
- All matters of policy, including appointments and promotions of persons in



executive posts in the Armed Forces and Police shall be dealt with by the Supreme Military Council.

- During the period of the Military Government, Military Governors will have control over their Area Commands in matters of internal security. The following appointments must be approved by the Supreme Military Council:

- Diplomatic and Consular posts.

- Senior posts in the Armed Forces and the Police.

- Super-scale Federal Civil Service and Federal Corporation posts.

- Any decision affecting the whole country must be determined by the Supreme Military Council. Where a meeting is not possible such a matter must be referred to Military Governors for comment and concurrence.

II. We the members of the Supreme Military Council of Nigeria meeting at Accra on 4th day of January, 1967, hereby solemnly and unequivocally: DECLARE that we renounce the use of force as a means of settling the present crisis in Nigeria, and hold ourselves in honor bound by this declaration. REAFFIRM our faith in discussions and negotiation as the only peaceful way of resolving the Nigerian crisis. AGREE to exchange information on the quantity of arms and ammunition in each unit of the Army in each Region, and also on the quantity of new arms and ammunition in stock. (Signatures of the nine leaders).