

# Drug Intelligence Brief



DRUG ENFORCEMENT ADMINISTRATION  
INTELLIGENCE DIVISION

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## NIGERIA: COUNTRY BRIEF



### STATUS IN INTERNATIONAL DRUG TRAFFICKING

Nigeria continues to be the major hub in Africa for the transshipment of Southeast Asian (SEA) and, to a limited degree, Southwest Asian (SWA) heroin to Europe and the United States. Nigerian drug trafficking organizations are among the largest trafficking groups engaged in the smuggling of SEA heroin into the United States. In recent years, Nigerian drug trafficking has expanded at an unprecedented rate. Nigerian traffickers are not only operating from Southeast Asia and Africa, but also from South America. Currently, there are hundreds of loosely organized Nigerian trafficking groups, which operate extensive global networks that control the sub-Saharan

drug markets. Nigeria is also a transshipment country for multikilogram quantities of cocaine from South America being transported to Europe, Asia, and Africa, especially South Africa. Marijuana, grown in Nigeria, is shipped to Europe and West Africa. Nigerian traffickers are well established in Southeast Asia and Europe and are rapidly entrenching themselves in such diverse places as the former Communist bloc countries of Eastern Europe, South Africa, Russia, Brazil, the Philippines, and South Korea.

## CULTIVATION AND PROCESSING

### *Cannabis/Marijuana*

The only illicit drug produced in Nigeria is marijuana. Cannabis is cultivated in all 36 states, primarily in northern Nigeria and in Ondo and Delta States in the southern part of the country. Nigerian marijuana is consumed locally and exported to neighboring countries and Europe, but has limited impact on the situation in the United States.

### *Opium Poppy*

Opium poppy cultivation has not been detected in Nigeria, although favorable conditions exist in several parts of the country.

## TRAFFICKING

Nigeria and Nigerian drug traffickers dominate the African drug trade. Nigerian trafficking organizations are responsible for a significant amount of SEA heroin smuggled to the United States. Nigerian traffickers are well established in other parts of West Africa, Southeast Asia, and Europe and are rapidly entrenching themselves in such places as the former Communist bloc countries, South Africa, Russia, Brazil, New Zealand, and the Philippines.



**Heroin courier arrested in Thailand**

Large quantities of heroin enter Nigeria via containerized cargo shipments and air cargo from the Golden Triangle (Burma, Laos, and Thailand); however, because of

heightened search and security measures instituted by local law enforcement at the airports, there has been an increase in the amount of drugs entering Nigeria overland from neighboring countries, such as Cameroon, Niger, and Benin, that share long stretches of a porous border with Nigeria.

Nigerian organizations control the sub-Saharan drug markets, maintaining a presence in opium-producing centers of Asia and the markets of many heroin-consuming nations around the world. Nigerian traffickers do not distribute as much heroin in Europe as in the United States. They have limited access to heroin distribution markets in Europe since Turkish trafficking groups control the major wholesale heroin distribution markets there. Europe is the primary market for SWA heroin, which is supplied by these Turkish groups. Consumers in the United States prefer SEA heroin over SWA heroin because SEA heroin is less expensive. Nigerian traffickers supply this heroin to U.S. consumers.

Nigerian traffickers have links to South American cocaine producers and permanent distribution networks in Europe, the New Independent States, and East Asia. They are responsible for most of the cocaine found in South Africa; they control both wholesale and retail distribution in that country. Nigerian cocaine traffickers were first detected in South Africa in 1992. Since then, they increasingly have used South Africa as a transit area for smuggling cocaine to Europe.

Nigerian traffickers continue to be active in India, recruiting non-Nigerian couriers. Consequently, their smuggling activities have become more difficult to detect. In addition, Somali traffickers enjoy a close relationship with their Indian traffickers. Reporting reflects that Somali traffickers have become brokers between Indian and Nigerian traffickers.

Throughout Nigeria, cannabis is a source of cash to be used in illegal cross-border trade for food or consumer products. Nigerian marijuana and marijuana resins are consumed in Nigeria and exported to neighboring countries and Europe, which is the primary consumer. Nigerian marijuana is smuggled into Europe concealed in commercial shipping containers, many of which enter through ports in the Netherlands. In the past, Nigerian marijuana was often smuggled into the United States. Now, however, Nigerian traffickers concentrate on smuggling cocaine to Europe and heroin to the United States because of a greater profit.



**Ship with containerized cargo**

Nigerian criminal organizations, specialists in moving drugs and other contraband, are heavily involved in corollary criminal activities, such as document, immigration, and financial fraud. Their ties to criminals in the United States, Europe, South America, and South Africa are well documented. Nigerian criminal organizations exact significant financial and societal costs, especially in West African nations with limited resources for countering these organizations.

### ***Trafficking Groups and Smuggling Methods***

Nigerian drug trafficking groups are loosely structured, but closely connected to each other; this allows for the free exchange of information, personnel, and resources. Nigerian groups are able to react quickly to law enforcement efforts. These groups are based on family or tribal affiliations. Members of the Yoruba Tribe have established a strong presence in heroin-producing countries and consumer countries. Members of the Ibo Tribe are the most frequently arrested Nigerian group smuggling heroin into the United States. According to the DEA Lagos Country Office, 90 percent of those arrested are from the Ibo Tribe.



**Drugs also are smuggled by Nigerian-controlled couriers of various nationalities**

Nigerian drug organizations are among the most numerous trafficking groups importing SEA heroin into the United States. SEA heroin is obtained in Thailand and transported to the United States via other countries, such as the Philippines. Other Nigerian traffickers obtain SWA heroin in Pakistan, shipping it through other countries to the United States.

As they have for the past 10 years, Nigerian traffickers use couriers to smuggle heroin to the United States and Europe. They recruit couriers of



**Nigerian couriers smuggle heroin concealed on their bodies**

diverse nationalities, backgrounds, genders, and ages, from Africa, Europe, Asia, and the United States. Couriers smuggle the heroin inside suitcases, ingest an amount (usually less than 1 kilogram), or conceal it on their bodies. Increasingly, Nigerian traffickers are using lower risk conveyances for concealing heroin, such as U.S. mail and express mail packages.

Cocaine also is smuggled by Nigerian traffickers by the same concealment methods as heroin. Law enforcement officials in the United Kingdom and Germany are intercepting cocaine sent from South America in postal and express mail parcels.

## **DRUG-RELATED MONEY LAUNDERING**

Although Nigeria is not a significant regional or international financial center, nor an important tax haven or offshore banking center, drug traffickers continue to launder money in Nigerian financial institutions. Nigerian trafficking organizations use the country's financial institutions to convert drug profits into Nigerian currency for reuse in other countries. Drug proceeds in U.S. currency are transferred from the United States to third-country bank accounts that have Nigeria as the financial destination.

Nigerian traffickers bring huge sums of money into their country by various methods, such as Western Union, American Express, and other financial institutions. They also launder money in other countries, such as Canada, France, Hong Kong, the Philippines, Singapore, Sweden, the United Kingdom, and the United States.

Although the import or export of Nigerian currency is prohibited, there are no laws preventing the movement of foreign currency into, or out of, the country. Nigerians are allowed to have foreign currency accounts in Nigerian banking institutions without disclosing the source of funds. Finance houses, mortgage banks, and other nonbanking institutions perform banking activities without the same scrutiny from government officials as that given to banking institutions. Foreign exchange bureaus legally trade in foreign currency notes and traveler's checks.

In February 1995, the Nigerian Government promulgated a decree that criminalized money laundering; individuals found guilty of money laundering are subject to prison sentences of between 15 and 25 years. The decree imposed a ceiling on cash transactions by individuals and corporations, except through banks. It required banks and financial institutions to report suspicious transactions and foreign transactions of US\$6,600 or more. Under the decree, individual bankers may be held responsible for certain offenses and assets and properties can be seized. Between 1995 and 1996, the Nigerian Government took steps to prosecute suspected money launderers by establishing tribunals to try cases involving drug trafficking. Since 1995, enforcement of the decree has been uneven, with few seizures or convictions.

## **DRUG ENFORCEMENT AGENCIES AND LEGISLATION**

The National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA), established in 1990 by Decree 48, is the primary drug law enforcement agency in Nigeria. NDLEA has agents stationed at Nigeria's international airports, seaports, and border checkpoints. The Nigerian Customs and Excise Department turns over investigations to NDLEA. The Nigerian Army Military Police are involved in drug investigations only when one of their own is implicated. In 1994, the Nigerian Government appointed a special advisor on drugs, money laundering, and fraud, whose role is to coordinate the anti-drug efforts of NDLEA, Police, Customs, and Immigration officials.

The National Agency for Food and Drug Administration and Control (NAFDAC) is responsible for monitoring the acquisition and disposal of drugs by authorized manufacturers, importers, and distributors. NDLEA cooperates with NAFDAC to prevent diversion of these substances. There has been no evidence of the diversion of legitimate drugs and chemicals from Nigeria nor any reported cases of precursor chemicals transiting Nigeria.

Under Decree 48, possession of drugs can result in prison sentences ranging from 15 to 25 years, and life imprisonment for producers and traffickers. Under Decree 10 of 1990, the Nigerian Government can charge a person with illegal exportation of drugs if, having avoided detection departing Nigeria, the traveler is found in possession of drugs upon arrival at his/her destination. If found guilty, the maximum penalty under the decree is 5 years in prison upon the citizen's return to Nigeria.

The Nigerian Government's counterdrug efforts are unfocused and lacking in resources. The country's counterdrug policy focuses on stopping individual couriers and combating local cannabis production and marijuana consumption. Numerous small-time couriers are arrested, but major traffickers and their controlling organizations are largely unaffected. NDLEA attempts to prosecute these traffickers are affected by a weak judicial system and government corruption. Corruption is widespread in Nigerian Government and society. Besides resources and inadequate inter-agency coordination, corruption is the most serious obstacle to effective counterdrug performance.

## **DRUG ABUSE AND TREATMENT**

Marijuana, heroin, and cocaine are the drugs of choice for Nigerian abusers and are readily available in Lagos and other big cities at very low prices. Some abusers use both heroin and cocaine, relying on heroin to mediate the unpleasant side effects

associated with cocaine. Some abusers also mix cocaine with marijuana and smoke it in cigarettes. Marijuana use is generally tolerated with few arrests made for simple possession.

Drug abuse is increasing in Nigeria, especially among middle- and upper-class youth. Nigerian drug abuse experts and government officials blame the increase in drug abuse on a sharp decline in the standard of living in Nigeria and the glut of drugs in the country. Many cocaine and/or heroin couriers in Nigeria are paid partially or entirely in drugs. Those drugs are sold locally at cheap prices.

There are several addiction treatment facilities in the metropolitan area; however, the cost of receiving treatment is prohibitive for the average citizen.

The government and various social and civic organizations are working together to reduce the demand for drugs with financial aid, advertising campaigns, and demand reduction seminars. The NDLEA is responsible for educating the public about drug abuse and for after-care rehabilitation, special reintegration, and education of drug addicts.

### **NDLEA Statistics for the Period of January 8 to April 30, 2001**

	NDLEA Arrests	Total Kilograms Seized
<b>Marijuana</b>	272	2,725.72
<b>Cocaine</b>	3	9.06556
<b>Heroin</b>	16	20.253

*Note:* One arrest occurred at Murtala Mohammed International Airport in Lagos. The other arrests occurred throughout Nigeria.

*Source:* NDLEA

## **TREATIES AND CONVENTIONS**

Nigeria is a signatory to the 1961 Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs, the 1972 protocol amending the 1961 Single Convention, the 1971 Convention on Psychotropic Substances, the 1988 United Nations Convention Against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances, and is a member of INTERPOL.

## OUTLOOK

- Nigeria will continue to be a major hub in Africa for the transshipment of SEA heroin to Europe and the United States. Large quantities of SEA heroin enter Nigeria in containerized cargo and air cargo from the Golden Triangle.
- Nigerian drug traffickers dominate the African drug trade. They are one of the most significant trafficking groups smuggling SEA heroin into the United States, and they are responsible for most of the cocaine found in South Africa. Nigerian traffickers have connections to South American cocaine producers and cocaine distribution networks in Europe, the New Independent States, and East Asia.
- Nigerian marijuana is consumed in Nigeria and neighboring countries and exported to Europe, which is the primary consumer. It is no longer smuggled to the United States because of the greater profits realized from the trafficking of heroin and cocaine.
- Drug abuse is increasing in Nigeria, attributed to the glut of drugs in the country. Many drug couriers are paid partially or entirely in drugs, which are sold locally.
- The Nigerian Government, working with various social and civic organizations, is trying to reduce the demand for drugs with financial aid, advertising campaigns, and demand reduction seminars.
- Besides the lack of resources and unfocused drug enforcement policies, corruption is the most serious obstacle to Nigeria's counterdrug performance.
- In order to try to make progress on this counterdrug issue, in an international context, Nigeria is a signatory to various related treaties, one of which is the 1961 Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs. It also is a member of INTERPOL.

This report was prepared by the DEA Intelligence Division, Office of International Intelligence, Europe, Asia, Africa Strategic Unit. This report reflects information received prior to July 2001. Comments and requests for copies are welcome and may be directed to the Intelligence Production Unit, Intelligence Division, DEA Headquarters, at (202) 307-8726.