

Nigeria's Ruling Party Faces Challenges in 2014

And, Nigerian-American writes an opera about American slavery

Hello, and welcome to As It Is from VOA Learning English.

I'm Christopher Cruise in Washington.

Today on the program, we report on a new opera about a hero in the fight against slavery in the United States.

"There are elements of gospel, jazz, blues, and then you hear a 'field holler,' you hear ragtime, work songs."

But we begin today with a look at the difficulties facing Nigeria's ruling political party in 2014 -- especially from the main opposition party.

"And that change, whereas the way we have seen it, is inevitable. It is coming -- and it will come very soon. Politics is a game of number(s) and we are increasing by the day."

A look ahead to Nigerian politics in 2014, and a new American opera about slavery, written by a Nigerian-American, today on As It Is.

Growth of Nigerian Opposition Expected to Continue

There were major political changes in Nigeria in 2013. Different opposition parties joined, and many governors and members of parliament who were members of the ruling party left the party to join the opposition.

Experts say President Goodluck Jonathan and his party face major challenges this year as the country prepares for presidential elections in 2015.

Caty Weaver reports.

Nigeria's united opposition is now stronger than at any time since military rule ended in the country in 1999.

This opposition is called the All Progressive's Congress, or APC. Powerful members of other opposition parties and the ruling People's Democratic Party have joined the APC since July.

APC politicians like Hajiya Hafsat Mohammed Baba in Kaduna say people want change.

“And that change, whereas the way we have seen it, is inevitable. It is coming -- and it will come very soon. Politics is a game of number(s) and we are increasing by the day.”

Five of Nigeria’s powerful state governors recently left the ruling party and joined the APC. Among the five were the governors of the heavily-populated states of Kano and Rivers.

And 37 members of the National Assembly’s lower house have moved from the PDP to APC. Now, the PDP no longer has a majority there.

APC politicians and political observers tell VOA that as many as seven more governors will leave the PDP for the APC. They say members of the National Assembly’s upper house -- the Senate -- will do the same early this year.

Political expert Abubakar Sufiyan Osa Idu Al Siddiq says the loss of the governors’ support for the PDP hurts the chances for President Jonathan to be reelected.

“Definitely, People’s Democratic Party has never had it so bad because to be elected president of this country even if you have the majority of the votes, the law says that you must have 24 states out of 36 -- two-thirds of them.”

Ruling party member Saidu Usman Gombe says he does not believe the APC will be successful.

“This opposition party, they are deceiving themselves. Even in the party, that opposition, there is a lot of clash. And they will crack. They will break down completely before (the end of) 2014.”

The People’s Democratic Party has governed Nigeria since 1999. It is the only party to hold the highest positions in the central government and have representatives in the country’s 774 local governments.

But many members have been leaving the party because they are unhappy with President Jonathan. Some do not support his efforts to fight corruption. Some are unhappy that he did not follow a party custom that is designed to balance the presidency between leaders from the north and from the south.

President Jonathan reportedly has the lowest level of support of his rule. Experts say his opponents may try to remove him from office this year as they gain new members in the National Assembly.

I'm Caty Weaver.

You are listening to As It Is, a program designed to help you learn to speak, read and write American English.

Now back to Christopher Cruise. He reports on a new opera written by a Nigerian-American woman about slavery in the United States.

Thanks Caty.

Nigerian-American Writes Opera About American Slavery

The opera is called "Harriet Tubman: When I Crossed That Line To Freedom." Harriet Tubman is an American hero who escaped from slavery and led others to freedom.

Nigerian-American composer Nkeiru Okoye wrote the opera. She says she has been interested in Harriet Tubman all her life.

“I don’t remember ever not knowing about Harriet Tubman. My mother used to love to read my sister and me stories, so my mother probably told me about her even before I learned about Harriet in school.”

The American Opera Projects produced the opera. The U.S. National Endowment for the Arts helped finance it.

Harriet Tubman was born into slavery in the state of Maryland around 1820. In 1849, she escaped slavery by fleeing to Philadelphia, Pennsylvania -- the northern states did not permit slavery. Harriet Tubman immediately began her anti-slavery work.

“But she became famous because she went back down to rescue the rest of her family and anyone else that would go with her.”

Ms. Tubman led the creation of a series of hiding places that came to be called The Underground Railroad. Slaves who escaped used the places to travel toward freedom. The people who ran the Railroad were called “conductors.”

“Harriet, who became known as ‘Moses,’ was the most famous conductor in the U.S.”

There are many stories about Harriet Tubman’s life. Some of them are not true. Ms. Okoye says when she began to write the opera, she had planned to add to those stories.

“When I started this process, I wanted to pay tribute to Harriet Tubman by writing a highly fictionalized account of her.”

But she decided to try to get the facts instead.

“I spent three years getting to know Harriet’s world.”

Using that research, Ms. Okoye wrote what is called a “folk opera.”

“Which is slightly different from regular opera. Most of the music in Harriet Tubman is rooted in traditional African-American folk idioms. So, there are elements of gospel, jazz, blues, and then you hear a ‘field holler,’ you hear ragtime, work songs and there are things that sound like spirituals throughout the opera.”

Ms. Okoye says she wanted people who saw the opera to learn about the complete life of Harriet Tubman -- not just her heroism.

“The first act is called ‘In slavery’ and the second act of the opera is called ‘In Freedom.’ And I did that because I thought it was very important for viewers to experience Harriet as a full person. I think most people like to think of Harriet as a born liberator, and it robs them of an important part of the story. It’s kind of like hero worship. We don’t get that there’s this vulnerable person who’s there -- we don’t get the full picture.”

“Harriet Tubman: When I Crossed That Line To Freedom” opens next month at the Irondale Center in the Fort Greene neighborhood of Brooklyn, New York. Fort Greene was one of the stops along The Underground Railroad.

Thank you for spending some of your time with us today.

I’m Christopher Cruise reporting from VOA Learning English headquarters in Washington.



Contact information for VOA Learning English:

Postal address:

**VOA Learning English
Room 3400
330 Independence Ave SW
Washington, DC 20237
United States of America**

Email us at: LearningEnglish@voanews.com

Or go to our website -- learningenglish.voanews.com -- and click
"Contact Us."

Follow us on Facebook, YouTube, LinkedIn, iTunes and Twitter at
VOA Learning English

<http://learningenglish.voanews.com/>