



Nigeria – Researched and compiled by the Refugee Documentation Centre of Ireland on 24 January 2014

Is there any information available on Ogboni activity in Lagos State over the past year? Consequences of refusing to join, upon the death of one's father, who was a member? Are many police (or others in positions of influence) cult members?

Information on Ogboni activity in Lagos State or elsewhere in Nigeria during the past year was not found among sources available to the Research and Information Unit.

A European Country of Origin Information Seminar report published in 2002 by the Austrian Centre for Country of Origin and Asylum Research and Documentation, in a section titled "Traditional secret societies" (section 2.7.1), states:

"Secret societies have earned their name with a reason. Very little is known about them, the most widely reported and studied being the Yoruba Ogboni society. It is hard to estimate the number of secret societies – they might be in the thousands. Some of them are linked to particular villages, some to ethnic communities and /or political groups. The 'Reformed Ogboni Society' is an association of politicians and influential people, distinct from the traditional Ogboni society." (Austrian Centre for Country of Origin and Asylum Research and Documentation (ACCORD) (28 November 2002) *Nigeria: 8th European Country of Origin Information Seminar, Vienna, 28-29 June 2002, Final Report*, p.166)

An Australian Government Refugee Review Tribunal country advice document, in response to the request "Please provide recent information about the Ogboni cult.", states:

"Little is known about the Ogboni or their practices. Historically the Ogboni played an important role in the politics and affairs of the Yoruba peoples (present day Nigeria, Republic of Bénin and Togo) but the nature of the group has changed and its significance diminished since the 19th and 20th century. Sources indicate that today the group considers itself more akin to a social club like the Masons than to a secret society or cult, and its adherents are usually influential and financially well off members of society including judges and politicians. Sources indicate individuals, particularly the family of members, may face considerable pressure to join the group." (Australian Government Refugee Review Tribunal (20 April 2011) *Nigeria – NGA38592 – Ogboni – Forced Conversion – Location*, p.1)

An Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada response to a request for information on the Ogboni, in a section titled "General Background", states:

“The Ogboni society should not be confused with the Reformed Ogboni Society, which was created by Christians in the 1900s. Sources indicate that information about the Ogboni society is limited. Several sources also indicate that they are referred to as a ‘secret’ society or as a ‘cult’. In a chapter on organized crime in Nigeria in the book entitled *Traditional Organized Crime in the Modern World*, Obi N. I. Ebbe catalogues the Ogboni secret society as an organized crime organization.” (Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada (14 November 2012) *NGA104213.E – Nigeria: Ogboni society, including its history, structure, rituals and ceremonies; information on membership and the consequences of refusing to join*)

In a section titled “Rituals and Ceremonies” (section 1.4) this response states:

“The professor at the University of Leicester indicated that particularities about the rituals and ceremonies of the Ogboni society are a ‘secret that only an Ogboni member can answer,’ risking his or her own death.” (ibid)

In a section titled “Membership” (section 2) this response comments on individuals joining the Ogboni as follows:

“If one person’s parent was a member of the Ogboni Society, and that person had been exposed to their activities (e.g. meetings held at his or her parents’ house while the child was present so that over the years the child grew up knowing the identities of the Ogboni; or, the parent deliberately pledged that his or her child would become a member; or, if the child had been used as an assassin by the Ogboni in the sense that he or she had been the ‘courier’ who went into a target’s compound and added poison to the water source or whatever), that child would be expected to join. So, in essence only someone who has had a history with them in a very close manner can be intimidated into joining. And if this were in the Egba, Egbado or Abeokuta areas of Ogun State in particular (or within that region generally), their intimidation might work. Notwithstanding, the primary means of membership is voluntary. In most situations, individuals deliberately and voluntarily join these societies because they want power, financial rewards, and success.” (ibid)

An Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada response to a request for information on the Reformed Ogboni Fraternity, in a section titled “Nature of the Ogboni Institution” (section 1.1), states:

“William Idowu, a philosophy professor at Obafemi Awolowo University in Nigeria writing in the *Nordic Journal of African Studies* in 2005, indicates that the Ogboni group is a ‘powerful traditional institution [that] represent[s] the traditional attitude [in the] moral, legal, social and political life’ of the Yoruba. He indicates that the group ‘wield[s] utmost constitutional powers’ in the religious, judicial and political spheres, and that its members are the de facto lawmakers in their respective enclaves. He explains that this power arises from the Ogboni’s control of the political life of their respective communities as well as from the conception that they ‘possess the power of the sanctions of the gods,’ which gives them the status of ‘the most dreaded institution in Yoruba land’ in southwestern Nigeria. According to Idowu, the ‘Ogboni cult’ continues to be as influential as before, although its importance as a law maker has diminished ‘significantly’.” (Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada (13 April 2012) *NGA104054.E – Nigeria: The Reformed Ogboni Fraternity (ROF), including the nature of its belief system and its purpose;*

whether membership is compulsory, especially for children of members, and consequences for refusing to join the ROF; whether positions within the ROF are inherited)

This section also states:

“According to Idowu, the Ogboni institution's main goal is to promote law and order in their respective communities according to the ‘laws of the gods,’ thereby creating an ‘awareness’ that sin is a punishable offence against the norms of society and that ‘acts of sacrifice and rites of purification only remedy serious crimes’. Idowu further emphasizes that ‘the Ogboni cult ensures that moral injunctions and laws of the gods are observed while strict punishment is brought to bear on the person who violates the rules and regulations (custom) of the people’ since ‘punishment and sanctions are the sole prerogatives of the gods. Idowu also maintains that the Ogboni group is a ‘secret group’ since ‘[n]o one, except members can really know the depths of its practices’. Other academics also describe the Ogboni as a ‘secret cult’ or a ‘secret society’.” (ibid)

In a section titled “Membership” (section 3) this response refers to correspondence received from an assistant professor of African studies at the University of Birmingham as follows:

“Nolte indicated in her correspondence that forced recruitment is not a problem within the ROF since members can only join formally when they are of legal age and deemed of good character. She concluded by stating that children of members are not automatically members of the ROF.” (ibid)

This response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research and Information Unit within time constraints. This response is not and does not purport to be conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim to refugee status or asylum. Please read in full all documents referred to.

References:

Australian Government Refugee Review Tribunal (20 April 2011) *Nigeria – NGA38592 – Ogboni – Forced Conversion – Location*
www.ecoi.net/file_upload/1930_1352214182_nga38592.pdf
(Accessed 24 January 2014)

Austrian Centre for Country of Origin and Asylum Research and Documentation (ACCORD) (28 November 2002) *Nigeria: 8th European Country of Origin Information Seminar, Vienna, 28-29 June 2002, Final Report*,
<http://www.refworld.org/docid/402d06554.html>
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Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada (14 November 2012)
NGA104213.E –Nigeria: Ogboni society, including its history, structure, rituals and ceremonies; information on membership and the consequences of refusing to join

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[cisr.gc.ca/Eng/ResRec/RirRdi/Pages/index.aspx?doc=454266&pls=1](http://www.irb-cisr.gc.ca/Eng/ResRec/RirRdi/Pages/index.aspx?doc=454266&pls=1)

(Accessed 24 January 2014)

Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada (13 April 2012) *NGA104054.E – Nigeria: The Reformed Ogboni Fraternity (ROF), including the nature of its belief system and its purpose; whether membership is compulsory, especially for children of members, and consequences for refusing to join the ROF; whether positions within the ROF are inherited*

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[cisr.gc.ca/Eng/ResRec/RirRdi/Pages/index.aspx?doc=453927&pls=1](http://www.irb-cisr.gc.ca/Eng/ResRec/RirRdi/Pages/index.aspx?doc=453927&pls=1)

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Sources Consulted:

Electronic Immigration Network
European Country of Origin Information Network
Google
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Landinfo
Lexis Nexis
Refugee Documentation Centre Query Database
UK Home Office
UNHCR Refworld

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